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# Good to Great: A Case Study of an African American Literacy Coordinator's Role in Transitioning a School From Dependence on a Scripted Reading Program to Balanced Literacy

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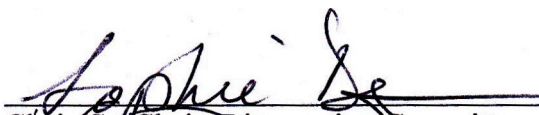
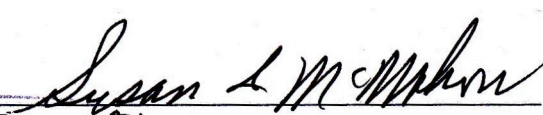
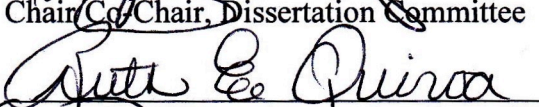
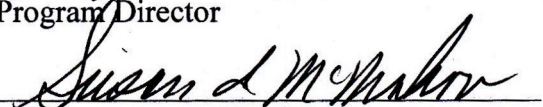
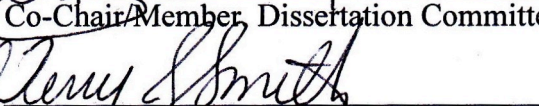
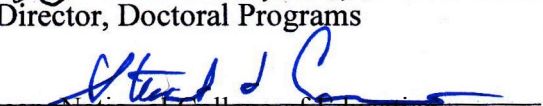
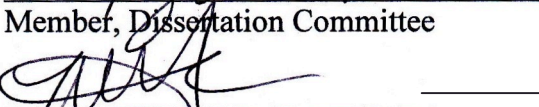
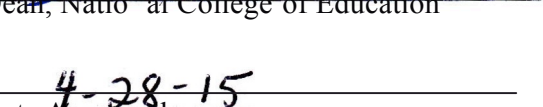
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Reading and Language Doctoral Program

Submitted for Approval

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Reading and Language Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment

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Kimberly A. Chase

## Abstract

This study considers the change process and the impact of race on the implementation process as a Literacy Coordinator transitioned an elementary school from Open Court to balanced literacy. A retroactive case study was used to examine the Literacy Coordinator's actions and decisions, teachers' perspectives, and the effects of race on the implementation. Findings suggested that the roles of the Literacy Coordinator involved duties that pull from the specific responsibilities of a reading specialist, literacy coach, reading educator, and an administrator. Furthermore, teachers reported a change in their practices and beliefs due to participation in the implementation process. Finally, findings suggested that most participating teachers did not attribute race as a factor in the transition process, although some acknowledged a strong racial component that may have affected the manner in which teachers responded during the implementation.

## Acknowledgements

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Dr. Wendy Gardner and Dr. Terry Jo Smith for their knowledge, guidance, support, and direction when necessary. Sharing your expertise helped me grow professionally and greatly improved the quality of this project.

I would also like to thank my family for making me believe that a little Black girl growing up on the South Side of Chicago could do anything. Because they believed in me, I can. And for those times when I lose sight of that which I know to be true:

“But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength.  
They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and  
not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.” --Isaiah  
40:31

To God be the Glory

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### **Background of the Study**

My work as an educator began, like many others, as a failing teacher in a school attended by children of color living in low-income neighborhoods. My knowledge of best practices, culturally and developmentally appropriate pedagogy, and research-based instruction was basically nonexistent. The training I received as a participant in an alternative certification program that placed teachers in school districts experiencing teacher shortages was painfully limited. This is certainly no indictment on alternative certification programs as much as it is a cautionary statement; a statement applicable to educators with the responsibility of teaching young children to read and write proficiently and those of us who are responsible for providing teachers with the tools to provide effective instruction to the children in our schools. Traditional teacher certification programs usually require one or two classes with an emphasis on teaching reading and writing which only minimally prepares teachers, particularly teachers in areas serving children with high academic needs typically situated in areas with high concentrations of low income, Black, and/or Hispanic children. Because teachers do not always receive the preparation they need to meet student academic needs, research supports a variety of approaches to equip them with the tools to plan and implement effective literacy instruction. Some of these approaches include professional learning communities, coaching, and professional development (Joyce & Showers, 1982; Paglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, & Supovitz, 2003; Shanklin, 2006; DuFour, 2007). My school had none of these supports, and my students suffered because of my lack of knowledge and experience, combined with this lack of professional development

program

About 20 years after beginning my teaching career, I was provided with an opportunity, as the school Literacy Coordinator, to move that K-8 school from “good to great” by coordinating a transition from literacy instruction using the Open Court (SRA Open Court, 2005) program to full balanced literacy. I had come a long way professionally having earned a Masters in Language and Literacy and a Reading Specialist Certification, together with 20+ years as a classroom teacher, college instructor, instructional coach, and professional development facilitator in minority schools. My experiences working exclusively in schools serving predominately Black and Hispanic children further prepared me to complete this task successfully since the target school was 98% African American. The years I spent teaching in minority schools provided me the experiences and practical knowledge needed to lead a school towards balanced literacy instruction, as well as the desire to ensure that children of color from low-income households have access to effective reading instruction through my work with teachers. I had acquired a burning desire to improve instructional opportunities for more children of color because of the poor instruction I had observed and participated in as a beginning teacher in the schools where I worked. In the end, I took this task very seriously, looking at it as an opportunity to provide for teachers what had not been available for me as a new teacher. I also saw it as an opportunity to ensure that the children at this school would be taught by teachers who are prepared to plan and implement effective literacy instruction for the African American students in their classrooms.

Research supports the use of explicit phonics instruction coupled with rich,

authentic literature as a balanced approach to teaching children to read (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; IRA, 1999; Willows, 2002; Rasinski & Padak, 2004). My knowledge of literacy research and my own classroom experiences have led me to believe this balanced approach, via balanced literacy instruction, is an ideal method of teaching children to read and write. Characteristics of balanced literacy instruction, namely, its student-centered, assessment-driven focus that incorporates components of the gradual release of responsibility, make it particularly suitable for African American learners (Au, 2007). Through balanced literacy instruction, students are taught to read and write by participating in activities that require them to actually read and write for authentic purposes, and benefits students who may experience limited amounts of these types of literacy experiences at home.

The implementation of a school-wide balanced literacy curriculum is challenging as it not only requires a change of instruction, but of school structures, culture, and oftentimes beliefs (Stahl & Hayes, 1997; Guskey, 2000). Balanced literacy is not a reading “program” ready to be implemented at the request of the principal with the purchase of balanced literacy materials. The commitment to full balanced literacy implementation requires years of focused professional development, classroom observations, modeling of lessons, ongoing review of supporting literature, and coaching by experienced, reading professionals (Killion, 2000; NSDC, 2001; Rodgers & Pinnell, 2002; Walpole & McKenna, 2004). These reading professionals must possess balanced literacy content expertise, as well as knowledge of and the ability to create effective literacy systems of school change to support the movement away from teacher reliance on turning pages in a teacher’s edition in a commercial reading program, to a reliance on

one's own knowledge about reading processes, instruction, and assessment. In addition, these reading professionals must also have the ability to see a new system existing sometimes in conjunction with, and sometimes at the expense of the old system. In other words, this person must maintain a vision of this new system, while simultaneously creating and arranging systems that will sustain the old while moving toward the new (Senge, 1990; Carlisle, J.F. & Berebitsky, D., 2011). Finally, these reading professionals must be able to present and promote this vision and the corresponding plan to individuals on a school staff who may or may not agree with the vision. Often at odds with the new vision are the inevitable challenges to beliefs and philosophies that impact classroom practices as they relate to literacy instruction (Senge, 2000). In this study, I was that professional who had all of these qualifications and capabilities, as well as a history of professional improvement from an ineffective to an effective teacher, multiple opportunities to observe ineffective teaching, and the deep desire that every child would have access to effective literacy instruction.

Learning to read and write proficiently and critically is a fundamental requirement for later success in life. Despite all that we currently know about best practices and effective literacy instruction, many students still struggle to attain basic literacy skills (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Allington, 2009; Fiester, 2010). Unfortunately a disproportionate number of African American, Latino, English Learners, and students living in poverty are among those who read and write at levels far below their White counterparts (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Allington, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

When a child fails to learn to read in those first few crucial years of schooling,

they are at a very high risk of never reading on grade level, never finishing high school, joining a gang and turning to crime and drugs (Fiester, 2010). On the other hand, children who do learn to read at proficient levels by the end of third grade are positioned to benefit from the opportunities that result from good reading instruction, such as academic success, entrance into post-secondary institutions, a variety of career choices, and ultimately, economic success (Fiester, 2010). The disparities in reading achievement are very clearly delineated between White and non-White children, with African American, Latino, and Native American children scoring below proficiency at levels of 85%, 81%, and 78% respectively in contrast to their White peers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Students who have *access* to effective reading instruction also have *access* to the jobs, careers, and prospects that will afford them the means to *access* opportunities that only economic attainment can achieve. In contrast, research indicates that students who do not have access to effective reading instruction in the primary grades have a much greater likelihood of experiencing reading difficulties throughout their entire school career (Juel, 1988). This difficulty in schools can be traced to academic sustainability, job and employment prospects, as well as long-term income-building potential. Reading ability is only one factor, albeit an important one, that has a direct effect on the life options available to a child as she enters adulthood.

President Obama stated that education is the “civil rights issue of our time” in his speech at the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the annual National Action Network national convention on April 6, 2011 (Smith, 2011). Former president Bush also made reference to reading as a “civil rights issue” at an appearance for Head Start initiatives in 2002; the precursor to federal initiatives that focused on reading through teacher training and system

accountability that would eventually become the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002. Bush's exact words were as follows: "The new civil right in America is reading." Statistics on the conditions affecting reading instruction in schools attended by mostly minority children from low-income homes indicate that these children are less likely to have the same access to effective reading instruction than their White counterparts. Thus, by being denied the 'right to read', they are consequently being denied their civil rights if reading is indeed, the new civil right.

The conditions affecting reading instruction for children of color from who live in neighborhoods with majority populations from low socioeconomic levels are well documented (Kozol, 1991; Au, Raphael, & Mooney, 2008; Jerald, Haycock, & Wilkins, 2009;). African American children, particularly those from low-income households, disproportionately attend under-resourced, low-performing schools and are often taught by teachers with less experience and education, and who are ill-prepared to teach reading effectively (Jerald, et. al, 2009). The Education Trust reports that there are almost twice as many first year teachers in high-minority schools than low minority schools (Jerald, et. al, 2009). And despite the efforts of Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954, which mandated legal desegregation so that White and non-White children could benefit from the same funding, schools have quickly returned to segregated places of learning. Currently, more than 1/3 African Americans and Latinos attend "intensely segregated," or apartheid segregated schools of 90-100% minority student populations in cities such as Detroit and Chicago (Orfield & Lee, 2006).

Federal legislation and initiatives such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Common Core State Standards (CCSS) continue to place demands on states, districts, and

schools to hold Black and Latino students to the same standard as White students without regard for the racial, economic, or home backgrounds of the students (Taylor, 2006). Failure to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP), as outlined by NCLB, brings the threat of sanctions, prompting schools with predominately minority children to implement curriculum and pedagogy to positively affect student achievement and, hopefully increase test scores. A well-prepared teacher is one of the most important ways to improve student achievement, and often in increased student test scores (Darling-Hammond, 2000). It is well documented that teacher expertise, knowledge and experience has a clear and direct impact on student academic success (Clay, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Ruddell & Unrau, 2004). A highly influential report of classroom reading instruction titled First Grade Studies, was conducted more than 40 years ago by Bond and Dykstra (1967), and found that teacher training in reading had a direct effect not only on student achievement but, more specifically, on student reading achievement. Studies conducted in the 40 years since the First Grade Studies have further supported this assertion, highlighting the critical nature of the teacher's practical content knowledge of reading instruction (Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Haycock, 2001; Marzano, 2003).

An effective teacher is one who, according to the International Reading Association, (2000) (now International Literacy Association) consistently fulfills the following criteria:

1. Operates within the knowledge of reading and writing development under the belief that "all children can learn to read and write"
2. Uses continuous assessment and student's prior experiences in planning and instruction



3. Knows when, how, and why to use a variety of reading instructional strategies
4. Implements reading materials and texts from a variety of levels, genres, sources, etc.
5. Uses flexible grouping techniques and differentiating instruction for groups and individual students.
6. Utilizes scaffolded teaching techniques strategically, incrementally, and purposefully.

Principals also have a critical role in ensuring effective literacy instruction, a role second only to that of the classroom teacher, as she must provide teachers with the support needed to foster high levels of literacy expertise for all students (Marzano, Waters, and McNulty, 2005; Fullan, 2007). In order to accomplish this success, the principal must serve as an instructional leader in the building, or more specifically, as a literacy leader. The role of literacy leader is important in all school contexts, but is particularly critical in schools that serve elementary students, given that this is the age in which the foundation for later reading success is established (Dowell, Bickmore, & Hoewing, 2012; McKenna & Walpole, 2013). Principals must facilitate the implementation of instructional programs and practices grounded in literacy research so that teachers may acquire theoretical and practical knowledge of best practices (Marzano, Waters, and McNulty, 2005; Reeves 2008). Providing principals with the concentrated training in literacy instruction needed to serve as literacy leaders can be difficult, however, since principal leadership programs must expose future principals to many areas of study besides reading in order to prepare them to manage school budgets, hire

personnel, oversee building operations, and many other roles (Reeves, 2008). In lieu of a principal with a strong literacy background, a Literacy Coordinator can dutifully stand in as an administrator with literacy expertise, teaching experience, and knowledge of sound professional development planning and practices (International Reading Association, 2010).

The roles and duties of a Literacy Coordinator should not be confused with other literacy professionals such as the Reading Specialist or Reading/Literacy Coach. The International Reading Association (IRA) (2010) defines the different roles of the literacy professional beginning with Category III in their ‘Standards for Reading Professionals’. This document lists a hierarchy of actions, activities, and academic preparation for the differing levels of preparedness necessary for these diverse reading professional roles. It also outlines the increased responsibility that each level takes on to expand the level of impact within the school community (International Reading Association, 2010).

According to the IRA (2010), the Reading Specialist should have the following qualifications:

- Previous teaching experience
- Master’s degree with concentration in reading education
- A minimum of 24 graduate semester hours in reading and language arts and related courses
- An additional 6 semester hours of supervised practicum experience.

The Reading Specialist works mainly with students providing reading instruction or intensive reading services to students who struggle with reading.

The Reading or Literacy Coach must have the same qualifications as the Reading Specialist with the requirement of taking additional courses, experiences, and knowledge of adult learning and professional development. The Reading Coach may also work with students, although the focus of this particular role is usually on school-wide literacy

leadership and long-term professional development. In this role, the Literacy Coach impacts a greater range of students due to her involvement in improving the reading practices of classroom teachers.

The Reading or Literacy Coordinator must also have the academic background, experiences, and responsibilities of a Reading Specialist, and of a Literacy Coach, as well as the ability to plan, coordinate, and implement activities that contribute to systemic change at the school or district level (International Reading Association, 2010; Senge, 2000). The Literacy Coordinator must have a vast knowledge of reading instruction and second language acquisition like the Reading Specialist, and may provide support for teachers on implementing instructional programs and practices like the Literacy Coach. It is often the responsibility of the Literacy Coordinator, however, to ensure the highest standards of achievement for all students in a school or district, broadening the impact of this role to a systematic level, with potential to affect many more students, classroom teachers, and even other administrators. Often considered an administrative position, the Literacy Coordinator is responsible for developing, managing, and evaluating the literacy program, oftentimes taking on the administrative roles of evaluating and supervising teachers, as well as supporting them through coaching and professional development (International Reading Association, 2010). In this age of high accountability and increasingly more complex literacy demands on all schools, especially those serving traditionally underserved students, a strong literacy program demands the close attention of a Literacy Coordinator. Such an individual has the knowledge and expertise to ensure that teachers are planning for, and implementing reading instruction that honors the right of the child to benefit from research-based reading practices and effective reading

instruction.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

Historically, reading instruction for all students has long been a priority in American education as evidenced by Bond and Dykstra's *First Grade Studies* (1967), Jean Chall's *The Great Debate* (1967), leading up to No Child Left Behind in 2000. The various methods used for reading instruction have waxed and waned in popularity over the years, although the use of basal readers for teaching reading has been a constant. Basal readers, or core reading programs, are described as any reading program produced by commercial publishers that usually includes one or more designated textbooks for each grade level, with smaller readers for the primary grades, and a teacher's guide with explicit directives on how to deliver reading instruction to children (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Brenner & Hiebert, 2010). Due to a variety of factors including federal policies such as Reading First a majority of classroom teachers have taught reading through the instructional methods outlined by the authors of basal reading programs (Brenner & Hiebert, 2010). Basal readers have been described as a "predominant influence on classroom reading instruction" as they "constitute the entire reading program of many elementary classrooms" (Cloud-Silva & Sadoski, 1987). In fact, between 75% and 90% of teachers are currently using basal or core programs to guide their literacy instruction (Morrow & Gambrell, 2000; Education Market Research, 2010). Most importantly, however, such programs often fall short of providing teachers with the tools to deliver reading instruction as the researchers intended and cannot be considered a substitute for a well-prepared teacher, able to assess, plan, and deliver differentiated instruction based on students' individual instructional needs (Dewitz, Jones, & Leahy,

2009; McGill-Franzen, Zmach, Solic, & Zeig, 2006; Brenner & Hiebert, 2010).

Balanced literacy instruction, on the other hand, can be used in lieu of a basal reading program to provide student-directed instruction that can potentially meet the needs of a majority of students. Cowen (2003), describes balanced literacy as a research-based, comprehensive system of reading and writing instruction that allows teachers and practitioners to respond to students' instructional and developmental levels in regards to phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, decoding, and motivation. Not to be confused with a core reading or basal program, balanced literacy is a philosophical orientation that supports the notion that the students, not the teacher or a teacher's curricular edition, drive instruction through assessment data (Fountas & Pinnel, 1996; Frey, et. al, 2005). Oftentimes, publishers claim their programs are balanced literacy programs, but also promote fidelity to the program as designed (Dewitz & Jones, 2013), which is inconsistent with the idea that student needs determine the instructional focus—an important component of a balanced literacy program. Balanced literacy as intended, incorporates the flexibility of a variety of instructional approaches to support the differing levels of student reading development as determined by students assessment results (Frey, et. al, 2005). Ultimately, the purpose of balanced reading is that students learn to decode words, understand and interact with what they read, and learn to read for the joy and love of reading in the context of student-driven instruction (Cowen, 2003).

Ongoing reading achievement, as evidenced by increased reading test scores, is a constant demand of schools all across the United States. This is particularly true for schools in areas that serve students who have traditionally struggled with classroom curriculum. The overwhelming response by school leadership in low-performing schools

has been to bring in a reading program, particularly a program with a focus on phonics or skills-based reading instruction, oftentimes neglecting the ‘balance’ in reading instruction that includes the incorporation of rich literature, writing, and other activities that promote meaning-based instruction, as well as genuine purposes for reading (Allington, 2002). Although these programs often tout great successes, through self-conducted studies, the results are often questionable, showing no results from outside studies to support these claims (Manzo, 2004). On the other hand, research shows that schools that implement a more comprehensive approach to reading instruction, incorporating skills-based and meaning-based instruction, do experience successes in a variety of contexts including schools in urban areas (Pressley, Roehrig, Bogner, Raphael & Dolezal, 2002; Rasinski & Padak, 2004; Frey, et. al, 2005). Balanced literacy involves more than just helping teachers become knowledgeable about the components of a program, as such programs provide teachers opportunities to engage in the thoughtful, intellectual task of learning about students to employ relevant, effective instructional processes.

The teachers at the focal school had been using a scripted, somewhat restrictive basal program that also emphasizes skills-based instruction before I began my work there as Literacy Coordinator. I took on the position as Literacy Coordinator in this school serving African American children from low-income households, with the major responsibility of transitioning the school from the SRA-McGraw-Hill Open Court (2005) basal reading program to balanced literacy instruction, eventually eliminating the reliance on a core reading program or basal series completely. Thus, instruction would correspond with beliefs regarding balanced literacy in that, with the use of formative assessments, explicit instruction, and rich literature, student instructional needs would determine the

instructional focus. The responsibilities of my position entailed providing teachers with a theoretical and practical understanding of reading practices characterized by the balanced literacy philosophy, instructional framework, and the patterns of practice that lend themselves to specific types of instruction within these patterns. My goal was to also prepare teachers so that that our students would have access to reading instruction from a teacher qualified to help them reach their fullest academic potential through a balanced literacy curriculum (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Allington, 2009). Accomplishing this task, however, required all teachers to change aspects of their instructional practices and, in some cases, deeply ingrained beliefs about teaching, learning, and reading instruction. Meister (2000) suggests that a focus on five essential areas is important when considering implementing change in a way that has lasting effects in a school building. These five areas include the following:

1. Building a vision
2. Collaboration
3. Professional development
4. Support and leadership from administration
5. Assessment of the change process

Kelchterman (2005) also suggests that the implementation of new policies and practices affect teacher emotions, further complicating the change process.

In my review of the research, I identified three primary themes that validated the structures, materials, practices, and curriculum I established for the transition from basal reading instruction to balanced literacy at my school. The first theme was a focus on professional development to ensure teachers made changes in their planning and

instruction and moved away from a highly scripted basal reading program to a full balanced literacy instruction that does not include the use of a core program. According to Darling-Hammond (2000), teachers who receive professional development are more likely to use research-based instruction in their classrooms, which would ultimately result in increased student achievement in reading. As teachers become less dependent on their teachers' guides, professional development serves a critical purpose in that they learn new skills and strategies that replace their dependence on a teacher guide that typify a balanced literacy approach. At times, teachers, principals, and other instructional staff are required to implement new practices and adjust operational norms when they are unprepared to make the changes needed to adopt these new strategies and instructional norms (Marzano, et. al. 2005). This brings to bear the need for adult learning options, such as that which may occur during professional development, that are intended to assist and support those expected to alter practices so as to improve instructional outcomes.

A second theme was a focus on the leadership decisions, practices, actions, and beliefs that were all used in concert to initiate and maintain the transition from a basal program to balanced literacy (Dowell, et al. 2012). In this case, literacy leadership was my responsibility as the administrator with an in-depth understanding of the critical elements of effective literacy instruction likely to lead to systemic changes in instruction necessary for a full balanced literacy implementation.

At the core of any implementation process in a school is the attitude and response teachers exhibit towards change. School leadership can decide to implement a new instructional policy while teachers are then expected to change their practice in accordance with these new mandates or initiatives without regard for how a teacher



considers the new approach. As a result, teacher beliefs emerged from the research as a third, necessary focal theme given the impact that teacher beliefs have on teacher practices (Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, and Lloyd, 1991; Cheek, Steward, Launey, and Borgia, 2004). A teacher's philosophy towards certain practices often determines whether the his/her actions will oppose or support that particular practice. If these practices are in conflict with the teacher's values or beliefs about teaching and learning, fidelity to implementation may be impacted because teachers may choose not to carry out practices that differ from their beliefs (Richardson, et al, 1991).

As my work with the teachers progressed I realized that I, an African American woman, was performing supervisory duties over a teaching staff of mostly White women. Research indicates that the teaching population is comprised of about 85% White women (Feistritzer, 2011). Although the teaching staff at the school in this study did not meet the 85% exactly, the makeup of the teaching staff was comprised of majority White teachers at about 70%. While I did not know at the time exactly what the impact of the school's racial composition would be on my practice, prior experiences working with other groups of teachers who were, as the statistics indicate, mostly White females, led me to anticipate that I would have to be intentional about how to promote the change process with considerations regarding whether teachers would accept my leadership as an African American woman. I wondered if I would be made to adjust my actions and decisions resulting from the manner in which teachers might view and respond to me as an African American woman in a leadership position at their school. I expected that teachers would respond to my work as the Literacy Coordinator (as an extension of me) in ways that were infused with race, gender, and insidiously ingrained hegemonic beliefs of who

should be in leadership positions and in positions of power.

Research informs that a teaching staff becomes and remains effective through strong leadership and ongoing professional development (National Staff Development Council, 2001; Dowell, et. al, 2012). In addition, teacher beliefs can significantly impact the implementation of new programs at some point, even determining the varying levels of success that may be applied to any implementation process. Teachers needed a rationale and a willingness to change their instructional practices to make the shift from following a scripted reading program to implementing balanced literacy practices and philosophies. The manner in which leadership practices and professional development affect teacher beliefs is often instrumental in determining the type of change that occurs in the school (Senge, 2000). Temporary, or first order change is a type of surface-level adjustment often put in place in schools that eventually revert back to past practices representing the status quo. Second-order change, on the other hand, challenges deeply held beliefs and requires new ways of thinking and acting. (Marzano, et. al, 2005). A profound shift in beliefs and subsequent actions is required for teachers to make such a change (Marzano, et. al, 2005). As schools struggle to keep up with the increasingly demanding requirements of Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) for NCLB requirements, permanent changes are necessary to ensure that students continue to achieve long after the initial implementation period is over.

### **Purpose of the Study**

While there is a growing body of useful research about the role and work of the Literacy Coach (Lyons & Pinnel, 2001; Lapp, Fisher, Flood, & Frey, 2003; Walpole & McKenna, 2004; 2008) the search for scholarly research on the role(s) of the Literacy

Coordinator yields significantly less material, despite the fact that this role and its responsibilities may potentially have a much broader impact on a school or district than that of the Literacy Coach (IRA, 2010). Furthermore, due to the fact that the Literacy Coordinator often makes decisions that affect whole districts and/communities, it is of great benefit to the educational community to take a closer look at this position in an attempt to identify the actions and activities of an effective Literacy Coordinator to inform the work of other school leadership as they strive to find ways to improve their own literacy systems. I would also hope that further study of the Literacy Coordinator would help to legitimize the importance of this particular position in the school community as an essential part of administrative staff.

The Literacy Coordinator position has tremendous potential for significant wide-ranging impact in a school and/or district as she is often the person responsible for developing district or school-wide literacy curriculum, designing and/or delivering a professional development program, supervising teachers, evaluating literacy programs and instruction, and supporting the literacy development of students at all grade levels (IRA, 2010). Performing the duties outlined by this position are made more complex if the Literacy Coordinator is a person of color working with mostly White teachers, a situation with potential to bring issues of power and race, and the inherent conflict this represents, to the surface as tensions increase when individuals engage with one another in ways that are antithetical to the way in which society's power structure is arranged.

Given the scarcity of research on the Literacy Coordinator role, and the equally unexamined factor of race in relationship to this role, the current case study examines the change process from scripted, basal reading program to that of a student-centered,

balanced literacy program at an urban, Midwest K-8 elementary school by focusing on the actions, beliefs, roles, and responsibilities of an African American Literacy Coordinator placed in a position of power with the task of successfully implementing this change. The study also considers the retrospective viewpoint of the teachers involved in the change process. The study is recounted in a narrative in accordance with the tenets of Critical Race Theory (Sol'orzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001), and offers a retrospective look at the instructional transition process. It is told from the perspective of the Literacy Coordinator, as well as the perspectives of the mostly White teachers who participated in this change process. Specifically, this study outlined the actions, activities, thoughts, and decisions made by the Literacy Coordinator during the transition from Open Court to balanced literacy instruction. Since systemic change involves the principal players on the "ground floor", in this case the teachers; thus, the study also considered teacher reflections around peer, student, and school leadership interactions that occurred as they navigated their way through the change process. Engaging teachers in this reflective exercise allows for consideration of how their perspective of the change process can inform the planning and implementation of change components. Thus, this study provided a unique opportunity to study the actions, events, activities, and results from the perspective of the people involved in the context over a period of time after they occurred. Such a perspective could be useful for other literacy leaders of color who share the responsibility of preparing teachers who may or may not belong to the same racial, ethnic, and/or cultural backgrounds, and who may also have diverse expectations and unspoken agreements regarding perceptions of acceptable approaches and styles of leadership. Such considerations are particularly important for

the body of school improvement and institutional change research given its examination of the Literacy Coordinator role in the greater context of the manner in which change efforts may be affected, influenced, and potentially altered by race-based nuances, relationships, and perceptions.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions that guided this study are as follows:

1. What happened during the implementation of balanced literacy and how did teachers perceive the implementation/change process?
  - a. What actions, decisions, and activities did the Literacy Coordinator implement to equip teachers with the tools necessary to change their instructional practices to teach balanced literacy without the use of a scripted basal program?
  - b. How do teachers describe their own experiences during the transition and the impact that the three-year change process had on their teaching?
2. Did race, or perceptions of the Literacy Coordinator role as it related to race, influence the change process in any way, and if so, how?

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was used as a frame for this study. CRT began in the 1970's in the law field as a way to consider how the experiences of people of color can be used to explain the existence of racism. CRT expanded to include educational institutions rather than racism between individuals. One of the tenets of CRT, as described by Sol'orzano & Delgado Bernal (2001), places value on the experiences of people of color

told by people of color. To this end, I used narrative to explain the story of this study as a means to convey the contextual and social aspects of leadership charged to implement change in an environment that may challenge these effort coming from an African American woman.

A second theoretical framework used to inform this study is Fullan's (2007) theory of change described as involving three phases that leaders can use as a guide to plan, implement, and monitor the change process. First-order change works to improve upon the effectiveness of processes already in place. Second-order change, which can take two to three years, involves a broader, more systemic approach and requires major adjustments to the operating organizational structure, beliefs, and norms. Third-order change involves the institutional normalization of routines and actions that become a permanent part of the organizational structure, as those actions exemplify the characteristics by which the organization is recognized (Fullan, 2007). This study considers Phase 2 characteristics, or second-order change, comparing the processes of individuals at the focal school to the characteristics outlined in this particular phase.

Finally, the balanced literacy framework informed this study given the underlying belief that an ideal approach to reading instruction is a comprehensive approach (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Pressley, 2002; Pearson, 2004; Rasinski & Padak, 2004; Cunningham and Allington, 2011). Components of balanced literacy are used as external indicators of balanced literacy instruction. Professional development topics, teacher reflections, and other indicators of literacy practices and beliefs are weighed against balanced literacy beliefs and practices.

## **Overview of Chapters**

This chapter provided low literacy achievement for Black and Latino children attending schools in low-income areas as the background for the study, moving teachers from basal reading instruction to balanced literacy practices to facilitate effective reading instruction as the statement of the problem, exploring the change process through the work of a Literacy Coordinator as the purpose of the study, and subsequent research questions. The following chapter will consist of a review of the relevant literature and my theoretical framework, while Chapter 3 includes the methodology involving a deeper definition and rationale for the use of Critical Race Theory as my theoretical framework. Chapter 4 explores the findings from the data, while Chapter 5 concluded the study and features a discussion of the data, limitations, implications for further research, and a personal reflection.

## Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

### **Introduction**

The review of literature is presented in four parts. First, a review of basal readers and subsequent research is chronicled, followed by a review of literature on balanced literacy to establish the relationship between balanced literacy learning and basal reader instruction. Second, theoretical orientations in the area of teacher beliefs is presented, with a focus on teachers' beliefs about reading instruction and the manner in which reading teachers teach reading. Third, models of professional development and examples of effective professional development are documented. Fourth, the literature supporting the relationship between literacy leadership, literacy coaching, and the impact on classroom reading instruction and overall school improvement is reviewed as a foundation for this study. Finally, Critical Race Theory is explained and established as the theoretical base for this study.

### **Basal Readers**

Instructional material used to teach reading in American classrooms have been called many things over the years—horn books, primers, spellers, literature-based programs, basal readers, and more recently, core programs (Shannon, 1983; Smith, 2002; Almasi & Hart, 2011). Basal reading programs, currently termed contemporary core reading programs, are sets of textbooks referred to as anthologies that are written at appropriate readability levels for each grade. These programs often include materials with an emphasis on the primary grades in the form of leveled readers, guided readers, and decodables that contain reading content with a focus on a specific phonics element



(Brenner & Hiebert, 2010). One important feature included in basal program materials is the teaching manual, or teacher's edition, which is a book or series of books containing the reading content that teachers are to include in daily reading instruction (Brenner & Hiebert, 2010).

For the last 50-60 years, most American schools have used basal reading programs for their reading instruction. It is documented that in the years between 1940 and 1990, an estimated 80%-99% of teachers reported using basals for classroom reading instruction (Cloud & Silva, 1987; Koeller, 1988; Morrow and Gambrell, 2000). Currently, industry analysts at Education Market Research (EMR) report that as of October 2011, an overwhelming 84% percent of educators used a purchased core program series. Baumann, Hoffman, Duffy-Hester, & Ro (2000) assert that although teachers were reporting a decreased reliance on basal reading programs than in past years, a current resurgence in basal program use might be attributed to the Reading First program which outlined the component in No Child Left Behind guidelines (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2001) that focused on reading improvement. Reading First requirements called for the use of "a program of reading instruction that is based on scientifically based reading research (SBRR) and that includes the essential components of reading instruction and provides such instruction to children in kindergarten through grade 3" during a 90 minute uninterrupted reading block (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; p. 26). Because of NCLB (2001), many states and districts, including the focal state in this study, mandated the adoption of a core program to qualify for monies from the Reading First grant program (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). The time period of the Reading First Act through the No Child Left

Behind Act had a major influence on the manner of teaching reading in these core programs due to the influence of the National Reading Panel (NRP) report titled, *Teaching Children to Read* (2000). Reading programs had to align with NRP findings, which stated that effective reading instruction involved direct, explicit instruction of reading strategies. These reading skills, coined the Five Essentials, included phonics, phonemic awareness, comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency (Snow, et al, 1998).

The goal of NCLB, through the Reading First program, is to ensure that every child can read by the third grade (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). Reading First guidelines indicated that in order to achieve this, schools would need to adopt and utilize commercial programs with a heavy emphasis on phonics consistent with “coherent skills-based reading instruction” (p. 18). The Committee’s report had a significant and direct impact on the content that publishers included in their reading programs since schools desiring Reading First funds had to choose programs that met SBRR according to the National Reading Panel. Consequently, commercial reading programs emphasized a focus on explicit phonics instruction in the efforts to meet the criteria for SBRR and position themselves to be eligible to sell their programs to schools and districts across the country. As a result of the federal monies tied to the NRP report, reading instruction in American classrooms renewed a focus on phonics instruction because the majority of teachers were now using reading programs, as outlined in the NRP report, that emphasized direct, explicit phonics instruction.

**Limitations of basal readers.** There are documented benefits for using basal programs, as studies show that potential for student reading growth is possible when such

commercial programs reflect best practices and current literacy research and are implemented with fidelity (Barkesdale-Ladd, 1994). The myriad of criticisms for basal readers, however, can be traced throughout the history of their use in American classrooms (Smith, 2002). It is reported that teachers who use basals become alienated from their reading instruction because these instructional manuals, not the teacher, provide the reading objectives, the manner in which to reach the objectives, and associated assessments (Durkin & Smith, 1979; Shannon, 1983; Komoski, 1985). Teachers are removed from making decisions about student growth, becoming relegated to the role of “technician” or “manager” of classroom reading instruction (Duffy & Ball, 1983), particularly if the program is taught with fidelity with minimal deviation from the instructions in the teacher’s edition. In following the teacher’s manual, teachers actually accept their lack of control over the content, teaching method, and instructional pace because fidelity to the program demands that the manual material maintain a major influence over instruction (Shannon, 1983).

Regarding content, studies have shown that commercial reading programs do not necessarily provide the best quality instruction in this area. Research asserts that the volume of reading and the amount of time spent reading positively affect comprehension and overall reading achievement (Allington, 2002). A study of the six most popular core reading programs, however, found that directions in the teachers’ editions for these programs did not include opportunities for actual reading (Fisher, Berliner, Filby, Marliave, Cahen, & Dishaw, 1980; Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox, 1999; Lewis, 2002), although Allington (2002) lists time reading texts as one of the essential criteria for developing reading and writing proficiency.

Researchers remain steadfast in their assertions that effective reading instruction follows when teachers are experienced with reading content. Regardless of this factor, well-intentioned principals often make the choice to incorporate reading programs in their school buildings that are designed to take the place of teacher-led instruction rather than involve teachers in a school-based program that will increase their reading content knowledge (Curwin, 2012). Several of the most popular reading programs, such as Success for All, Direct Instruction, and SRA McGraw-Hill Open Court (2005) are considered highly prescriptive, or scripted programs. The purpose of these reading programs are the improvement of student outcomes regardless of the knowledge level of the teacher (Cooter, 2003). When following a scripted reading program, the teacher is expected to follow a pre-set sequence of lessons, complete with activities and assessments, as well as a teaching 'script' that is read to students as a manner of instruction (Duncan-Owens, 2009). Having used a scripted program myself for about seven years and later given the responsibility of assisting the teachers participating in this study transition from the same program to balanced literacy instruction has provided me with a considerable amount of insight on this subject. In accordance with my own experiences with scripted reading programs, there are advantages and disadvantages to using such a program that is acknowledged by practitioners and researchers alike.

Principals indicate one benefit of scripted programs is the consistency of the instructional content (Duncan-Owens, 2009). Principals can be confident that each classroom at each grade level will cover the same reading material in a manner that is easy to monitor in terms of instructional activities and lesson planning since both are outlined in the sequence of daily lessons (Duncan-Owens, 2009). An additional

advantage involves the assertion by core program publishers that their reading programs contain material that includes SBRR and is aligned with Reading First requirements.

The disadvantages reported by teachers and researchers regarding the use of scripted programs are substantial (Rice, 2006; Shannon, 2005; Garan, 2004). Because instructional decisions are already determined within the context of the teachers' manual, teachers can become separated from the instructional process and function more as managers of the reading program than active participants and facilitators of the instructional process (Garan, 2004; Shannon, 2005). The practice of following a scripted reading program can ultimately 'deskill' teachers as the option for determining and applying appropriate instruction is replaced by performing the next pre-designated activity in the teacher's edition (Rice, 2006). Teachers report an insistence on the part of program developers and administration to 'stick with the program,' often at the risk of ignoring the instructional needs of students struggling with the content. It is difficult, however, to gauge the effectiveness of scripted programs even though there may be substantial research on these particular programs (mostly on reading sub-skills such as phonics knowledge and phonemic awareness), because most of said research is conducted by the program developers themselves (Yatvin, 2000).

Research calls for qualitative, peer reviewed research conducted by parties on overall literacy development in order to provide credible information on the effectiveness of commercial reading programs (Yatvin, 2000). So far, while students usually show gains in basic literacy skills such as phonics and phonemic awareness, higher-level literacy skills such as inferring, critical analysis, and higher-level literacy gains in the upper grades do not support the long-term use of scripted reading programs (Dewitz, et.

al, 2009; Brenner & Hiebert, 2010). In fact, the results of the implementation of the \$6 billion dollar Reading First program which required the use of scripted reading programs, resulted in statistically significant gains in decoding skills but limited gains in comprehension, and serves as further confirmation of the limited effects that such reading programs have on higher level skills (USDOE, 2008). Comprehension, while important in the early grades, is particularly important in the intermediate and subsequent grades as it provides the foundation for success in high school and beyond (Sweet & Snow, 2003). As academic demands on schools and districts continue to rise, and schools focus on preparing students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce, the research on basal programs use should encourage school leaders and teachers to revisit the question of whether such preprogrammed instruction is the best way to meet these demands for all of their students.

### **History and Overview of Balanced Literacy**

Schools which choose not to use reading programs may opt for balanced literacy instruction instead. Madda, Griffo, Pearson, & Raphael (2011) describe the notion of balance in a literacy curriculum as a focus on reading and writing instruction that encompasses equally emphasizes all components of literacy. The balance within reading instruction does not emphasize a distinction between code or skills instruction and meaning making, but incorporates both approaches in planning, assessment, and daily instructional activities. An effective balanced literacy approach is one that allows for shifts in teacher support at different points during instruction according to the needs of the student, which does not occur while the teacher follows the directions outlined in the teacher's edition of a basal reader (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). This student-directed but

teacher-managed approach accomplished through balanced literacy is orchestrated out of a belief that the student drives the curriculum, not the other way around (Madda, et. al 2011).

The roots of the term “balanced literacy” instruction can be traced to 1995 when the California Department of Education and state leaders were faced with disappointing literacy outcomes on state standardized assessments, even after implementing literature-based reading instruction or whole language (California Department of Education, 1996). Bill Honig (1996) agreed with the California Reading Task Force report (1995) and other prominent reading researchers (Adams, 1990; Clay, 1991; & Juel, 1994) who determined that the way in which students were being taught to read at the time was not proving to be an effective method of instruction. Consequently, these and other researchers joined efforts to sound the alarm for policymakers and educators to take a closer look at the literacy instructional model in place, which primarily included a literature-based, whole language model with a focus of instruction on the meaning of written text to the exclusion of phonics instruction. Since this model was found to be less than effective (California Reading Task Force, 1996), researchers and educators considered a “balanced” approach to teaching reading. The plan for such an approach would include the benefits of language-rich literature instruction coupled with explicit phonics and skills instruction (Honig, 1996).

The preceding section included a brief historical review of balanced literacy. Within balanced literacy lies the two reading approaches that ultimately comprise the two motivations, skills and meaning. The next section describes the conflict, termed the ‘Reading Wars’ that exists between these two approaches to reading instruction, followed

by an examination of the components that characterize balanced literacy instruction.

### **The Reading Wars**

Many years prior to the whole language debate, educators took up what became known as the “Reading Wars” in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Smith, 2002). First, the spelling method, a previously popular instructional approach, drew criticism from educators who remarked that, "Children... are taught to spell and read what they do not understand, to define without understanding the definitions, and to commit to memory the words of grammar...while scarcely a sentence is understood" (Robinson, Faraone, Hittleman, & Unruh, 1990; p. 22). At this time, the field of reading began to consider phonics and comprehension as "mutually incompatible" and "highly political" entities not in concert with one another (Adams, 1990, p. 22). Additionally, a distinct separation between skills- instruction and meaning-based instruction rose to the forefront at this time. Since then, proponents from the two prevailing camps, namely, phonics/code-emphasis or skills-based (Bottom Up) and the holistic/whole language or meaning-based (Top Down) instruction have advocated for their particular instructional approach, although it should be noted that this particular debate only addressed the manner in which beginning stages of formal reading instruction should occur (Madda, et. al, 2011).

The “Bottom up” approach involves skill instruction prioritizing the basic reading processes such as letter identification, letter-sound association, blending, segmenting, manipulating sounds, decoding, and word identification (Adams, 1990). The Top Down method approaches reading acquisition as a natural process, much akin to learning to speak. Here the focus of learning to read is on the meaning of the message and not its discrete parts, such as letters, individual words, etc., as these only play a part in



communicating the message. (Adams, 1991). Proponents of whole language also believe that children learn both language and reading through social interactions (Goodman, 1986). Here, teachers are viewed as mediators of the literacy process as they facilitate opportunities for the child to access written language through authentic experiences with text (Adams, 1991). Whole language supporters reject the notion of exposing students to isolated phonics instruction in favor of focusing on whole stories to glean the overall meaning of written text. Eventually, the reader learns to read as a result of interacting with a literate environment and the motivation that results from independent interactions with engaging literature (Goodman, 1986). Although experiences with literature are crucial for normal literacy development, especially among children with limited exposure to literature at home, research indicates that the benefits of whole language are useful for kindergarteners, but do not extend beyond the kindergarten year (Stahl & Miller, 1989). On the other hand, Stahl & Miller (1989) found that first graders derive a substantial benefit from phonics instruction.

Despite the fact that the “Reading Wars” have been ongoing, involving years of time and energy in the defense of one position over the other, and that other forces have contributed to the politicization of these disputes, these debates have actually highlighted the shortcomings of an either/or, singular approach to reading instruction (Pearson, 2004; Mada, et. al, 2011). Both approaches have proven valuable, yet neither is as effective as when explicit phonics instruction is taught in the context of a literature based, print-rich environment (Pearson, 2004). The National Reading Panel Report agrees that, “systematic phonics instruction is only one component...of a total reading program” and that “phonics instruction should be integrated with other reading instruction in phonemic

awareness, fluency, and comprehension strategies to create a complete reading program” (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; p. 11). The recently adopted Common Core State Standards (CCSS) brings this balanced perspective forward with a standards model that integrates all aspects of literacy. Included in the CCSS is a detailed framework of very specific phonics expectations listed in the Foundational standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010), as well as fully-developed comprehension expectations highlighting that the ultimate goal of reading and writing is to comprehend what one reads, to do so critically, and to synthesize and respond to texts analytically (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

### **Balanced Literacy**

As previously noted, the term ‘balanced literacy’ is more than just a term or a set of practices. Rather, it involves a philosophical orientation that includes a combination of both skills- and meaning-based instruction that ultimately results in increased literacy achievement for most children (Rasinski & Padak, 2004; Pressley, Roehrig, Bogner, Raphael & Dolezal, 2002). These beliefs impact the thoughts, opinions, and perceptions that are exhibited as a certain set of actions and activities teachers plan for, and incorporate within their classroom instruction. The balanced literacy practitioner adopts the position that students, rather than the teacher or authors of a reading program, drive instruction through assessment data (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The balanced literacy practitioner also embraces the notion of teacher efficacy--that teacher planning and practice makes the ultimate difference in student outcomes (Fitzgerald & Cunningham,

2002; Metsala & Warton-McDonald, 1997). Integrated factors within this balanced approach include flexible instruction based on assessment results, direct, systematic phonics instruction, a focus on the early grades, and early intervention for children displaying reading difficulty in the first few years of schooling (Pressley, 2002; Allington, 2009).

The balanced literacy perspective is built upon a framework of direct, explicit instruction, gradual release of responsibility practices, and authentic reading and writing experiences that take place with, to, and by students (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Balanced literacy instructional components that lend themselves to the gradual release of responsibility include read-alouds, shared reading and writing, guided reading and writing, and independent reading and writing activities. Along with the expectation that assessment data will drive instructional decisions, these components are expected to promote differentiated instruction that addresses students' specific instructional needs, thus increasing the likelihood that reading and writing outcomes will improve (Fitzgerald & Cunningham, 2002).

From the start of the twenty-first century, educators have agreed that one single approach could not bring about student literacy gains for all students (Rasinski & Padak, 2004). Furthermore, the literature is clear in its support of a balanced approach that includes teacher-directed (teacher modeling of essential reading skills and strategies), student-driven (based on assessment results and students needs) instruction (Au, Carroll, & Scheu, 1997; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Willows, 2002; Almasi & Hart, 2011).

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000), describes effective literacy instruction as one that has a focus on both skills and meaning and that

incorporates the explicit teaching of skills in the five literacy components (phonics, phonemic awareness skills, comprehension strategies, vocabulary instruction and fluent text reading), as well as spelling, grammar and writing composition strategies (Willows, 2002). The International Reading Association (IRA) further advocates for the importance of balanced reading programs, taking the position that “there is no single method or single combination of methods that can successfully teach all children to read” (IRA, 1999, p. 1). Balanced literacy instruction allows for multiple methods of reading instruction, thereby increasing the likelihood that every student can become a successful, independent reader.

**Balanced literacy for African American children.** To equip African American children with the tools that will allow them to read and write critically and analytically, and compete with other children across the United States and the world, educators must be able to ensure African American students are able to accomplish the same tasks as their counterparts. This leads many to think that the same activities and actions used to prepare White children should be used in a similar manner with African American children (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). Many teachers find it hard to believe that institutions are not colorblind and embrace the notion that instruction is unrelated to culture, race, ethnicity, gender, or economic background of the students and teachers and should be treated as such (Gay, 2000). All students regardless of cultural, or ethnic background, can benefit from phonemic awareness training, explicit, systematic, sequential phonics instruction incorporated within meaningful text experiences (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; IRA, 1999; Willows, 2002; Rasinski & Padak, 2004). In addition, teaching children to read fluently with expression and at an appropriate rate, together

with developing students' vocabulary knowledge, and providing them with modeling and instruction around comprehension strategies significantly increases the potential for all students to perform successfully on academic tasks in American classrooms (Willows, 2002). The explicit, reading instruction included in balanced literacy instruction is considered essential for students from diverse cultural, linguistic, and low-SES backgrounds who may not have home literacy cultures that are compatible with school literacy expectations (Delpit, 1995; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). There are additional learning tasks, however, that make effective instruction for African American children somewhat distinctive from that which serves their White counterparts (Perry, et. al, 2003). This instructional approach takes into consideration the history of African American literacy in this country. A history that chronicles the once lawful then de facto efforts of the White majority to restrict African Americans' access to literacy. A history that, despite the very real dangers of doing so, recounts the persistent and valiant efforts of African Americans to pursue literacy as a way to become "literate as a way to reclaim one's own freedom and humanity to use as a weapon in the struggle for freedom and equality" (Perry, et. al, 2003; p. 21). Also a history that is overflowing with evidence of the "persistent denial and limiting of educational opportunities to African Americans" that still persists until this very day as evidenced by segregated schools, inequitable funding between these schools, and the stubborn achievement gap, or gap in opportunities available to African American students as compared to White students, that continues to plague African American communities of all socioeconomic levels.

Situated within this history is the cultural context of teaching and learning in classrooms serving African American children (Scott & Teale, 2009). This teaching can

occur classrooms in schools serving only African American students or classrooms where White students and African American students attend the same school. In both situations African American children, who may be involved in the same exact learning experiences as their White classmates, still struggle to perform at the same level as their White counterparts (Scott & Teale, 2009). In the past, some have found justification in ‘blaming the victim’ by placing the onus on perceived cultural, linguistic, and intellectual deficiencies as a rationale for why so many Black children still fail to reach minimum reading standards. I would rather, however, defer to a Louisiana grandparent of a Head Start student from Teresa Perry’s *Young, Gifted, and Black* (2003) who had this to say in reference to the disproportionate numbers of Black children struggling with classroom instruction: “If the corn don’t grow, don’t nobody ask what’s wrong with the corn.” In other words, the questions we should ask should NOT focus on what is ‘wrong’ with the African American child but what is ineffective regarding the instructional methods that fail to garner positive results for overwhelming numbers of African American students (Robinson & Lewis, 2011).

Responsive teaching assumes that learning tasks are appropriate for the situation and involves incorporating instruction in ways that are specific and appropriate for the instructional context (Irvine & Armento, 2001). Learners benefit from responsive teaching because the learner’s responses, reactions, and success (or lack thereof) determines the instructional methods and tasks. Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction (CRLI) assumes that all children bring a wealth of cultural knowledge, or cultural capital, with them to school every day. This cultural capital, as described by Bourdieu (in Perry, 2003), is a cultural competence that either hinders or facilitates

school achievement depending on whether the home culture is compatible with the school culture. Many students from backgrounds other than that which is Standard English-speaking, White, and middle-class possess a cultural capital that benefits them in their home culture, but does not necessarily serve as an advantage as it relates to the culture of the traditional American classroom.

### **Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction**

Studies suggest that Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction (CRLI) is a highly effective method that can be used to promote high achievement among culturally and linguistically diverse students. CRLI is intentional in its attempts to bridge the gap between the school and the world in which the child lives. To accomplish this, teachers are encouraged to adapt instruction to meet the needs of all learners through differentiation and incorporating values and philosophies originating from the home culture in planning and instruction. Gay (2000) proposes that utilizing these culture-specific values and philosophies as cultural funds of knowledge gives us important insight into the learning styles of ethnically diverse students which helps us to make learning more relevant, authentic, and ultimately validates their cultural identity. Teachers whose classroom reflects a culturally responsive approach can be identified by the following characteristics:

- High expectations
- Active teaching methods
- Guide, mediate, and facilitate learning
- Positive perspectives on the culture of students and families from diverse backgrounds

- Demonstrated cultural sensitivity
- Adjust (and readjust) the curriculum
- Student-directed classroom discourse
- Small group and cooperative learning

Au (2007) also notes that CRLI consists of the integration of home language and ways of interaction, a variety of literacy forms, reading for understanding, multicultural literature, and a focus on basic skills acquisition and early reading success all of which lend themselves to attributes characterized by balanced literacy implementation.

Balanced literacy shares many essential characteristics with CRLI including the expectation that teachers are expected to modify instructional practices and materials to meet the instructional needs of African American children (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Au & Raphael, 2000; Au, 2002; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Banks, 2004; Au, Raphael, & Mooney, 2008). Both CRLI and balanced literacy promote instruction include teaching the necessary skills to read and write fluently, critically, and intentionally (Au, 2002; Delpit, 1995, 2006; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development 2000). An important distinction between balanced literacy instruction and CRLI, however, is the *intentionality* towards engaging students from diverse background in learning opportunities that will lead to high levels of literacy (Delpit, 2006). This can be accomplished through encouraging modes of thinking that involves synthesizing information from multiple sources as well as analyzing and evaluating key information thus enhancing a child's ability to apply this knowledge to new and different contexts (Au, Carroll, & Scheu, 2001). This is necessary to prepare



the child of color from a low income background for jobs in the technological and information industries rather than jobs in agriculture and manufacturing; Industries that have sustained these groups of people in the past, but have become more limited as the demand for labor in these areas continues to decrease.

A balanced instructional method that includes higher level, critical thinking skills and lower level skills that include explicit phonics instruction for the purpose of decoding and identifying has proven effective with African American children and can be considered a compliment to a Culturally Responsive Literacy Instructional (CRLI) model (Au, 2007). Table 1 shows how balanced literacy practices and CRLI can work in concert to create authenticity and meaning to a culturally literacy rich environment.

Studies suggests that nearly all students can be taught to read and write in the early years of schooling when they engage in learning options that are designed for their specific learning levels (Frey, et. al. 2005) Preparing students for jobs and opportunities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires that effective teachers serving students of all classes and cultures balance elements of direct, explicit phonics instruction and language-based literature instruction (whole language) with multiple opportunities for application of those skills in higher level thinking and learning tasks (Pressley, 2002; Au, et. al, 2001). It would be difficult to meet the goal of promoting reading and writing tasks that encourage critical thinking through the use of a basal program considering that the most popular commercial reading programs usually focus instruction on rote learning of lower-level skills (Au, et. al, 2001). On the other hand, balanced literacy, together with culturally responsive literacy instruction, contributes to a meaningful learning

environment through the use of research-based instructional strategies and culturally relevant learning tasks. Culturally relevant literacy instruction must go beyond simply creating workers to take up space in society. CRLI must prepare students to be thinkers; to challenge the status quo (Ladson-Billings, 1995); develop an “equal chance to achieve in school, choose and strive for a personally fulfilling future, and develop self-respect regardless of home culture or language” (Sleeter & Grant, 1999, p. 157). Only then will we positively impact the cultural learning context for the African American child.

### **Balanced Literacy and Literacy Leadership**

**The principal.** The role of the principal as a literacy leader, while important at all levels, is imperative at the elementary level (Booth & Rowsell, 2007; Walpole & McKenna, 2008) where reading instruction is arguably the most important part of the elementary school curriculum (McCormick, 1979; Cunningham & Allington, 2011). Other content area subjects are enhanced by strong reading skills, making reading the foundation for success in all other school subjects leading to overall success in school and increased chances for success in adulthood (Juel, 1988; Zimmerman, Padak, & Rasinski, 2008).

Principals are the crucial factor in determining how literacy achievement will take place in their buildings. Principals must be aware of, and principal preparation programs must include, a wide variety subjects such as budgeting, educational law, building maintenance, discipline, curriculum, and the many other items needed to effectively manage a school building (Reeves, 2008). Preparation programs also need to equip principals to be instructional leaders in their buildings especially in the areas of literacy (Reeves, 2008). Furthermore, they need to acquire skills that will allow them to monitor,

manage, and evaluate teaching, learning, and coaching as it relates to their literacy programs (Booth & Rowsell, 2007; Reeves, 2008). While understanding building operations is vital, principals do not necessarily possess knowledge related to the essential elements of effective literacy instruction (Reeves, 2008). In fact, professional leadership standards for elementary principals fail to include any mention of literacy (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2002). Elementary principals need an enhanced knowledge of literacy processes and programs because of the increased focus on literacy within the last 15 or so years (NCLB, CCSS, etc.), as well as the complexity of literacy processes and, most importantly, the importance of ‘getting it right’ for students to reap the benefits of early literacy achievement (Reeves, 2008).

**Literacy coaching.** There are compelling reasons to look further into a principal’s capacity to be the instructional leader in the area of literacy at an elementary school. Every principal has a specialization that may concentrate on specific subject areas (math, science, social studies, etc.), or have strengths towards managing people, building operations, student discipline, etc. (Reeves, 2008). The elementary school, however, also requires a literacy leader who is able to create and sustain an environment supporting effective literacy instruction while also building capacity to maintain and develop higher levels of literacy achievement (Reeves, 2008). Research suggests that a knowledgeable principal and literacy coaching are effective ways to increase student reading achievement providing there are elements in place that support a change in teacher practice and, ultimately, a positive shift in culture (Paglinco, et. al, 2003). In the effort to continue improving the quality of reading instruction as outlined by the Reading First initiative in NCLB (2001), literacy coaching is a practical approach to help teachers

collaborate on a shared vision of effective instruction, and to put the pieces in place to increase their knowledge of reading instruction and apply it to their classroom planning and instructional activities (Carlisle, J.F. & Berebitsky, D., 2011).

The purpose of any change initiative is to improve student learning. Evidence is growing in support of literacy coaching as an essential component of change efforts that are accompanied by a focus on helping teachers learn and apply new and research-based instructional strategies in reading and writing that translate into increased student achievement (Paglinco, et. al, 2003). To be effective, literacy coaching should involve practices and behaviors that are likely to garner the desired results as outlined by school leadership (Shanklin, 2006) and include the following characteristics:

- All teachers have opportunities for collaboration and dialogue, not just new teachers or teachers experiencing difficulty.
- Shared literacy vision with connections to district goals and current research
- Crafting the structures and systems that will move the school towards the shared vision
- A focus on data--student assessment data and teacher instructional data
- Opportunities to guide teachers in student data analysis and subsequent planning and instruction, especially in the area of differentiation
- Engaging teachers in coaching cycles (8-week cycle of observation, post observation conversation and feedback, and in-class coaching) and study group participation allowing teachers opportunities to learn about and implement new and improved practices on an ongoing basis

- Supporting rather than evaluating teachers

Research by Joyce and Showers (1982) suggests the manner in which coaches help teachers learn to implement new skills is similar to the steps a good teacher executes in an effective classroom lesson. When learning a new skill, theory is first explained and used to justify the new approach. Next, a demonstration occurs where the coach models the practice. Then, teachers have an opportunity to practice the new skill for themselves. Following practice, the coach provides the teacher with feedback on aspects of the newly-practiced skill. Finally, the coach collaborates with, or coaches the teacher to determine mutually-agreed upon next steps to improve and/or sustain the new approach. It is believed that when literacy coaches implement these components in their coaching practice, 90% of teachers will transfer the new skill into their active teaching repertoire (Joyce & Showers, 1982).

**Literacy coordinator.** The research is extremely limited in its coverage of the duties, requirements, job description, and responsibilities of the literacy coordinator. While this study is focused on the decisions and activities of the literacy coordinator, the aspiring literacy coordinator does not simply find a literacy coordinator program to complete with the goal of becoming a literacy coordinator. The International Reading Association (IRA) (2010) asserts that the literacy coordinator must first complete a reading specialist program then advance in knowledge and experience to eventually become equipped to complete the duties of the literacy coordinator.

The responsibilities of a literacy coordinator build upon and include characteristics of other reading professionals as outlined by the IRA (2010), such as that of a reading specialist, a literacy coach, and a reading/literacy coordinator. In its Standards for

Reading Professionals, the IRA specifically outlines the professional experiences of the literacy coordinator under their Category III descriptors for reading specialists. In general, the literacy coordinator could potentially work at the early childhood, elementary, middle, or secondary, and/or adult levels and is expected to initially meet the following basic qualifications:

- Previous teaching experience
- Master's degree with concentration in reading education
- A minimum of 24 graduate semester hours in reading and language arts and related courses
- An additional 6 semester hours of supervised practicum experience

The literacy coordinator thus must be prepared to fulfill a number of roles and responsibilities starting in the classroom and subsequently expanding to include developing and/or managing literacy programs on a school or district level. Specifically, those responsibilities increase in complexity and knowledge level as outlined in Table 1. The role of the literacy coordinator, while clearly undefined and lacking much needed attention in the research, should therefore become more of a focus in schools that are charged with the task of improving literacy instruction in the efforts of increasing student achievement (Reeves, 2008).

**Table 1**  
*Preparation and Responsibilities of the Literacy Coordinator*

<b>Reading intervention Teacher/Reading Specialist</b>	<b>Literacy Coach</b>	<b>Literacy Coordinator</b>
Provides intensive instruction to struggling readers	<p>Completes the duties of the reading intervention teacher</p> <p>Provides professional development for teachers by providing them with additional support needed to implement various instruction programs and practices</p> <p>Provides essential leadership for the school's entire literacy program by helping create and supervise a long-term staff development process that supports both the development and implementation of the literacy program over months and years</p>	<p>Must be able to develop and lead effective professional development programs assuming some of the same responsibilities as the literacy coach.</p> <p>Has experience that enables effective work as an administrator in preparation for fulfilling the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing, leading, and evaluating a school reading program (K-12)</li> <li>• Working with systematic change at the school level</li> <li>• Serve as a resource in the area of reading for paraprofessionals, teachers, administrators, and the community.</li> <li>• Work cooperatively and collaboratively with other professionals in planning programs to meet the needs of diverse populations of learners</li> <li>• Provide professional development opportunities at the local and state levels.</li> <li>• Provide leadership in student advocacy.</li> </ul>

## **Teacher Beliefs**

Research offers a variety of definitions and labels for teacher beliefs. The assortment of terms referenced in the research includes “orientations”, “principles of practice”, “teacher epistemologies”, “teacher epistemologies”, or “practical knowledge,” and are all used to describe the process of “getting inside teachers’ heads” (Kagan, 1992). At the apex of school-based institutional change are beliefs and motivations for the choices teachers make in their classrooms. Knowing more about how a teachers’ beliefs impact instruction can inform change processes to the degree that the likelihood of implementing a successful school improvement plan can be increased by deliberately incorporating professional development topics and coaching activities that directly address those beliefs.

**The impact of teacher beliefs on behavior.** Teachers implement and/or incorporate instructional practices for a variety of reasons, not all of which involve tacit beliefs about teaching and instruction (Muchmore, 1994). Mandates, initiatives, and directives from administration comprise just a few of those external factors that impact teacher behaviors. The research is mixed, however, regarding whether teacher beliefs impact teacher behavior as related to instruction.

On one hand, studies assert that teacher beliefs are well-established frameworks of thought that resist change (Brousseau, Book, & Byers, 1988; Hermann & Duffy, 1989). Alverman, Smith, & Readance (1985) found that preexisting beliefs can be tenacious and firmly entrenched even when confronted with information that contradicts those beliefs. In the Alverman, et. al (1985) study, teachers were presented with reading passages containing information that challenged their particular beliefs. After having read the



information, participants were asked to recall the information as presented in the passage. The researchers found that the recall information was “grossly misconstrued” and based on what participants *believed* to be true without regard for clearly stated information presented to them in the text (Alverman, et al, 1985).

On the other hand, other studies indicate that teacher beliefs are, in fact, malleable and change based on internal and external factors, oftentimes working in concert to propel a change in behavior (Beijaard & DeVries, 1997; Cheek et. al, 2004). Beijaard & DeVries (1997) identified some of those factors to be dissatisfaction with the current program or prevailing condition, the influence of colleagues, studies of theory and practice in preservice programs, and the school culture, with this last element having the least impact of all.

**Influences on teacher beliefs.** Cheek, et al (2004) determined that university coursework also posed a strong influence on student teachers developing beliefs, as the acquisition of new knowledge encouraged a change in perception and subsequent behavior. In a mixed methods study of 153 preservice student teachers in reading and science methodology courses, Cheek, et al (2004) used the Teachers Reading Aptitude Reading Voice Scale (TARVS) to assess teacher perceptions of reading beliefs and behaviors impacting planning, instructional behaviors and student learning. Findings from the TARVS indicated a strong statistical correlation between the beliefs of preservice teachers and the decisions they made about lesson planning, instruction, and student learning. In other words, teacher beliefs are often influenced by external factors.

Further evidence that beliefs are flexible and subject to external influences is confirmed in Grisham’s (2000) longitudinal study comparing information provided in

teacher preparation programs with the classroom practices and beliefs of practicing teachers from the program. This particular study followed 12 preservice teachers through a three-year period during their teacher education program for K-8 teacher certification and a Masters' in teaching, and then for their first two years in the classroom. The results of this case study indicated that teachers combined personal, professional, and practical funds of knowledge.

More specifically, Grisham (2000) found that teacher education course material had a measurable influence on inservice teachers' beliefs about teaching, which was particularly evident during the first year of teaching. Furthermore, Berg, Grisham, Jacobs, & Mathison, (2000) also agree that teacher preparation programs impact teacher beliefs. Their research, however, captures the significant influence of teacher preparation material beyond the first year of teaching. In fact, Berg, et. al found that core beliefs from university programs continued to be realized more than 15 years after student teaching. Fortunately, these studies indicate that teacher beliefs, and the influence on teacher practices, can be positively influenced by outside entities since effective reading instruction is most likely to be impacted by professional development opportunities offered in teacher preparation programs rather than prepared reading programs (Allington & Johnston, 2002).

It appears that beliefs about reading instruction can be determined through interviews and classroom observations. In a qualitative study by Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, and Lloyd (1991), 39 teachers in the intermediate grades from six elementary schools were interviewed regarding their beliefs about reading comprehension instruction. In addition, their teaching practices were captured via classroom observations

and compared with their interview results. It was determined that the relationship between teachers' beliefs about teaching reading and their classroom practices was a "relatively strong" one. Results indicated that reading-related classroom practices could be reliably predicted using information from interviews focused on teacher beliefs.

It is of great benefit to school leaders and teacher coaches to know how internal and external factors influence teacher beliefs and teacher practice. A teacher's approach to reading instruction, methods, orientations, attitudes, and the like, is influenced by beliefs in the form of assumptions, opinions, and epistemological views (Stahl & Hayes, 1997). As schools adopt new curriculum, implement new programs resulting from new mandates and initiatives, and/or apply new instructional strategies to improve instruction and increase student test scores, teacher beliefs can potentially influence the success, or lack of success of these efforts. For the purposes of this study, teachers who are transitioning from a scripted basal to a balanced literacy program are assumed to implement major changes in their instructional planning, choices, and ultimately expectations as pertaining to literacy. Knowing the research on teacher beliefs and how to best determine such beliefs helps highlight opportunities that will impact beliefs and, ultimately, a teacher's ability to alter instructional practice when expected to embrace new programs.

### **Professional Development**

Schools must consider the prospect of providing teachers with professional development to assist them in acquiring the knowledge and skills to help students meet the goal of ever-increasing literacy demands (Guskey, 2000). The primary focus for professional development must be on improving instruction (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

Research shows that if any substantial change is to occur in the classroom and in school buildings, teachers are the key to that change (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Kanstoroom & Finn, 1999). Consequently, it is the responsibility of school leadership to provide meaningful learning opportunities for teachers that will result in improved instruction and higher achievement for all students. In order to do this, school leadership must participate in the process of systems' thinking (Senge, 1990), which is a method for considering the whole, rather than individual parts influencing patterns across institutions and ultimately leading to systematic changes (Senge, 1990). Systems' thinking requires school leaders to consider professional development as only one part of the system that impacts school improvement or instructional change. It also involves moving beyond the 'one shot' professional development in-service to instead consider a broader focus on the multiplicity of factors within the entire system that impact teachers' instructional needs and that are most likely to bring about increased student achievement (Cobb, 2005).

**Impact of professional development on reading instruction.** The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2012) notes that a quality education is available to students of teachers who regularly participate in professional development. NCES analysis found that the practices of teachers who had more training differed from those who experienced limited professional development opportunities. Teachers participating in more professional development displayed practices that resulted in higher reading achievement on National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) tests, including the use of more literature in their classrooms, and the practice of reading in conjunction with writing instruction. Effective teachers were also observed using fewer workbook pages, basal readers, and multiple choice assessments for reading--all teacher practices

associated with lower scores on the NAEP assessment. Linda Darling-Hammond (2000) asserts that high-quality, sustained professional development encourages the use of research-based instructional strategies that become part of a teacher's instructional toolbox and results in higher reading achievement for most students.

Broaddus and Bloodgood (1999) further extol the benefits of professional development for teachers of struggling readers, noting that teachers who address the needs of such students incorporate interventions into their reading instruction. Professional development opportunities also contribute to the sustainability of the school as a whole since they provide ongoing activities that prepare teachers with the skills to implement effective reading practices, while also helping to maintain and retain a well-prepared, qualified teaching staff (Killion, 2000; Rodgers & Pinnell, 2002).

**Characteristics of effective professional development.** Fred Wood (1994) identified characteristics of effective professional development that represent an evolution from common, but ineffective, practices of the past. Those characteristics include the following:

- Professional development is ongoing and systematic rather than isolated events
- The focus of professional development shifted towards individual school needs rather than district mandates
- Professional development foci is more research based including more adult learning considerations
- Teachers and principals have more input in the planning and implementation of professional development programs
- Teachers, paraprofessionals, and administration are expected to participate in professional development programs
- Professional development is considered within the context of other operations occurring within the school

- Research is the basis for professional development design, delivery, and evaluation

Additional characteristics of effective professional development involve collaboration in the form of professional learning communities so as to shift away from the norm of isolationism and closed classroom doors. Collaboration alone can manifest as simply a professional ‘get together’ without the incorporation of accountability measures, such as meeting norms, protocols, and follow-up activities. A collective group responsibility forms among the group members that have the potential to facilitate system-wide improvements through mutually-agreed upon adjustments to instructional practices (DuFour, 2007).

A primary reason for incorporating professional development within an instructional setting is to increase teachers’ understanding of, and ability to apply effective instruction in their classrooms (Shulman, 1986). Furthermore, research demonstrates that sustained implementation of targeted professional development sessions increases teacher knowledge of reading theory and instruction (Garet, Cronen, Eaton, Kurki, Ludwig, Jones, Uekawa, Falk, Bloom, Doolittle, Zhu & Szejnberg, 2008; Brady, Gillis, Smith, Lavalette, Liss-Bronstein, Lowe, North, Russo, Wilder, 2009; McCutchen, Green, Abbott, & Sanders, 2009). Studies regarding effective professional development provide clear evidence of the characteristics that support long-term and short-term change efforts. The National Staff Development Council’s (2001) standards for staff development include the following: a) Organized learning communities, b) Leadership support of ongoing efforts towards improved instruction, and c) Resources (training and materials) provided for teachers

Goldenberg (2003) states that change can only occur when elements are created or already in place that contribute to the attainment of the newly identified goals. The elements he deems important include a well-defined curriculum and instructional expectations, strong instructional leadership, group collaboration, and a shared vision and/or goals. Goldenberg (2003) goes on to purport that while it is important that the process or the 'how' of school improvement efforts is as important as the content or the 'what', and that the landscape of change can last from 3-5, and sometimes up to 10 years and can be characterized as nonlinear, unpredictable, and sometimes chaotic. True systemic change involves professional development that explicitly addresses these and other issues that ultimately must work together to shift the culture of an organization.

In the end, the ultimate goal of professional development must be change (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001). This change can and may involve a shift in philosophy, thinking, actions, expectations, learning, organizational patterns, structures, planning, and activities. It takes more time and energy to adjust instructional beliefs and practices than it takes to participate in previously established instructional routines (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001) because change elements involve all school personnel. Senge (2000) suggests that teachers, principals, and parents must be involved in creating a new way of thinking and operating. Additionally, Richardson (1998) states that teachers are at the core of systemic change and must be voluntary participants in the change process, especially as it relates to student needs, current effective practices, and their own learning. Overall, beginning the instructional change process must involve a combination of instructional practice goals that include teacher knowledge and skills, instructional theory, and relevant research (Richardson, 1998). An effective professional development system is dependent

upon involving teachers' prior knowledge given that true, positive change acknowledges, nurtures, and develops the prior knowledge and skills of participating teachers rather than ON A mandated in a top down approach (Senge, 1990). Courtland (1992) further contends that professional development focusing on teachers' concerns about the change process, connections between teacher practice and theory, and teachers' narratives about change best supports implementation efforts. At the core of all professional development efforts aimed at changing teacher practices, however, is the belief that all teachers can learn, grow, and improve. This belief is fundamental to the success of any professional development program that promotes genuine change (Walpole & McKenna, 2004).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Critical race theory (CRT) is the primary lens through which I examine the scope of my experiences, activities, and responses in relation to this study. CRT evolved out of Critical Legal Studies (CLS) in the mid-1970s by civil rights attorney Derrick Bell. CLS served as a progressive movement to bring to light contradictions within the law as there appeared to be obvious inconsistencies in the way certain groups were treated in legal situations as well as the manner in which the legal policies continued to create and sustain opportunities to maintain these inconsistencies (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). Through CLS, Bell was instrumental in promoting CRT as a method for examining the lived experiences of African Americans whose voices had not been considered as a contribution to, and/or determinant of a diverse social reality. Most importantly, Bell (1980) advanced the use of story and narrative to provide experiential accounts of how *Brown vs. Board of Education* affected the educational experiences of Black children, thereby establishing storytelling as an identifying and essential feature of CRT.



Critical Race Theory was formally introduced to the field of education in Ladson-Billings and Tate's article "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education" (1995). Within CRT, there are defining elements that steer critical race theorists away from the notion of objectivity in teaching, learning, and assessment and provide a lens through which to view the American educational system. Those elements include the following:

- Racism is normal and expected in a system created by Whites to maintain White superiority. Whites cannot see patterns of racism in this system because, while overt racism is unacceptable and obvious, subtle covert racism flourishes in an omnipresent, under the radar, matter-of-fact manner.
- Narrative, or racial reality, is essential to provide access to the diverse and sometimes opposing experiences of those oppressed within a system dominated by Whites. Awareness of this alternate reality can oftentimes trigger strong emotions such as denial, shock, and anger, but provides a viewpoint that Whites simply cannot access without the voices of those existing within these realities.
- Historical context is to be applied to events within the educational system. Information provided in textbooks, access to education, and even policy enactments and funding are all examples of actions and practices that have a history rooted in deeply ingrained racist beliefs and practices. Furthermore, this same pattern of experiences inhibits policies and practices that may positively affect challenges facing non-Whites within our educational system.

- According to Bell (1980), there must be an interest convergence resulting from any efforts towards racial equality. In other words, policies, enactments, and/or initiatives meant to improve the lives of Blacks must benefit Whites to an even larger degree. For example, the results of *Brown vs. Board of Education*, while accommodating to Blacks who were suffering from segregated, unequal access to education, was not celebrated as a move towards racial equality but lauded as a “blow to Communism” by the U.S. Justice Department. Fast forward 50 years later and one will find American schools as racially segregated as they were before *Brown* (Kozol, 2005).
- Finally, Bell (1980) asserts that although civil rights efforts will result in limited racial progress, racism is not likely to ever be resolved and should be considered a permanent feature of American society. This is not to say we should accept that Blacks have a subordinate place in society but that we should operate in the knowledge that racism is ever-present and is permanently engrained as a part of American culture.

Critical Race Theory plays an important framework for the current study given that my own experiences as a Black person living in America, as these have equipped me with a viewpoint and a sensitivity that allows me to recognize racism in every day life, as well as the manner in which racism is manifested in the differences in housing, schooling, the justice system, and other American institutions. As a result, my experiences in a school leadership position can only be considered with the insight of a Black woman

belonging to a traditionally marginalized group in America. Given that, this dissertation attempts to retrospectively consider the following:

1. The transition from the commercial reading program SRA McGraw-Hill Open Court to balanced literacy instruction;
2. The change process that occurred as viewed from different perspectives; and
3. In accordance with CRT, the manner in which racism was demonstrated as
4. staff related to me as a Black woman in a position of leadership, and how my leadership activities may have been affected by teacher perceptions of my actions and decision as I monitored and facilitated the change process.

This study also explores the utility and appropriateness of CRT as a methodological and analytical tool to unearth and identify indicators of inequality in the efforts to inform the work of Black women in educational leadership positions. Finally, CRT will be used to determine how issues of race and power were mediated and negotiated in a particular school environment.

Critical Race Theory will be used to unpack the impacts of race and racism in the focal elementary literacy environment, as well as to identify any social-educational consequences of racism on the change process so as to inform the manner in which African American women see and reflect on their actions when given the responsibility of leading organizational change.

### **Summary**

This chapter reviewed the literature associated with this study including basal reading programs, balanced literacy, professional development, and teacher beliefs. Critical Race Theory was established as the theoretical framework as the lens through

which this study will be considered. Chapter three will explain the methodology used to conduct this study including a description of the research design, data collection and analysis procedures, and limitations of the study.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### **Introduction and Research Questions**

This chapter addresses the methodology of this study and presents a retrospective case study research design that allows for clear articulation of the investigative process as it relates to events that have already occurred. Included in this chapter will be an explanation and rationale for the case study methodology, data collection process, methods and procedures used in the study, participants, data analysis procedures, and study limitations. The research questions that guided this study include:

1. What happened during the implementation of balanced literacy and how did teachers perceive the implementation/change process?
  - a. What actions, decisions, and activities did the Literacy Coordinator implement to equip teachers with the tools necessary to change their instructional practices to teach balanced literacy without the use of a scripted basal program?
  - b. How do teachers describe their own experiences during the transition and the impact the three-year change process had on their teaching?
2. Did race or perceptions of the Literacy Coordinator role as related to race influence the change, and if so, how?

### **Methods**

#### **Qualitative Research**

A qualitative research methodology was used to conduct this research study. According to Taylor and Bogdan (in Freebody, 2003) the characteristics of qualitative research are descriptive, inductive, multi-dimensional, considerate of multiple

perspectives, seeking knowledge of the subjects' point of view, and regards all settings and persons as worthy of study. The reason for employing qualitative research is that it allows access to the dimensions necessary for the current study in which I explain the change process described previously from my own reflexive point of view, alongside and interwoven with the reflexive perspectives of participating teachers. I took into consideration the internal thoughts and motivations, as well as observable actions and decisions that both the focal teachers and I identify and describe.

### **Case Study**

The Oxford dictionary defines a case study as follows: “a process or record of research in which detailed consideration is given to the development of a particular person, group, or situation over a period of time” (Oxford Dictionaries). Stake (2000), refers to the case study as a “bounded system,” with the case being the implementation process of balanced literacy instruction from a scripted reading program in a K-8 charter school. I investigated the way in which change occurred over time, as well as the results of that change. At the crux of the change process, and specifically considered as a focus in this study, are the considerations of the presuppositions, actions, and the decisions I made as a Literacy Coordinator, the manner in which these factors influenced how people in various roles processed and negotiated change as it related to literacy instruction, and how these actions influenced the school environment as we transitioned from Open Court reading instruction to balanced literacy.

Although it may be possible to generalize the outcomes of this particular study to similar situations involving change, the goal was to determine what, specifically, could be learned from this individual instance of the change process (Stake, 2000), or what

Stake refers to this as an intrinsic case study (Stake, 2000). Termed a “study of the particular” (Stake, 2000, p. 438), case study researchers may focus on what is common or shared about the case although oftentimes the results reveal what is uncommon or “particular”. To delve deeply in a case, and ultimately show the particularity or what is special about this specific case, case study research gathers data on the following: 1) the nature of the case, 2) its historical background, 3) the physical setting, 4) other contexts such as economic, political, legal, and aesthetic, 5) other cases through which this case is recognized, and 6) those informants through whom the case can be known (Stake 2000, p.438-439). The case study researcher attends to these features of the case itself in the effort to understand what is distinct, particular, and complex about this specific case, rather than attempting to draw conclusions with the goal of making generalizations (Stake, 2000).

This study examined data from an urban, Midwestern Title I school transitioning from a basal reading program to balanced literacy. To learn from this particular process, one would need to describe the occurrences regarding this change process as it took place, and be able to determine the applicability of those occurrences to the current instructional context (Stake, 2000). This study provides a description of situations and implementation procedures through the examination of artifacts and teacher reflections, and allows for an examination of systems that can be improved to promote permanent systemic change. A case study is a methodology that, among other things, digs deep in the description process of one particular set of circumstances in an effort to provide the researcher with a perspective from which to analyze the effectiveness of the implementation process (Stake, 2000). Marshall and Rossman (1999) assert, “Case

studies take the reader into the setting with a vividness and detail not present in more analytic reporting formats” (p. 159).

**Limitations of case studies.** This case study explored questions regarding what occurred during the change/implementation process and how teachers perceived that particular process. The nature of qualitative research, particularly the case study, limits the generalizability of the study. As previously noted, however, the goal of case study research is not to generalize but to extract specifics about a particular case so as to provide thick descriptions and deeper understandings about that case (Stake, 2000). The case study researcher may have interest in the case with or without an interest in contributing to the research community through generalizability. The contribution may rather occur through ‘recognizability’, meaning others recognize similarities and differences that allows one the opportunity, language, and theory in which to view their own experiences. Because of this, generalizations are not, and should not be the goal of all case study research (Stake, 2000).

While the case study is often useful in situations where elements such as interviews, surveys, and documented conversations can be utilized to examine the actions, activities, decisions, and professional development topics and models used to assist teachers in incorporating balanced literacy practices and instruction, there are concerns to using a case study. Yin (2003) suggests that a case study may lack rigor, is too lengthy, does not lend itself to scientific generalization, and displays results that are often too massive to read, understand, and/or analyze. Creating and following research procedures and systematic protocols particularly regarding collecting and analyzing data are very specific and useful ways to address these limitations (Yin, 2003).



**Retrospective case study.** This study is a retroactive case study because the outcome is already known. It examined events that have already occurred to provide information on how those events potentially influenced the outcomes. Retroactive case study is a methodology that allows for reflection on events and activities that have already occurred and seeks to reconstruct the time line of occurrences after said events have already taken place (Street & Ward, 2010). Retrospective case studies share the following three characteristics: 1) The events take place before data are collected, 2) Data is available from first-person accounts as well as archival data, and 3) the end results, or outcomes, are already known prior to the data collection process (Street & Ward, 2010). According to these descriptors, this study meets the criteria for a retrospective case study.

### **Participatory Research**

There are many ways to study a particular practice or situation. An individual can breach the boundaries of a particular system to investigate its aspects as an “outsider” who has temporarily permeated a particular bounded system to study the phenomenon. This person enters the setting, however, without the background or lived experiences that allow for a deep understanding of the context and culture (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). On the other hand, participant research, or insider research, illustrates a situation where a person from within the constraints of that particular system studies a phenomenon from the point of view of a contributor and member of that system and, more than likely, the phenomenon being studied. Items that constitute the community wherein the phenomenon occurred such as the language, traditions, and patterns of interaction, are considered (identified, described, analyzed) by members within the same community.

This particular perspective is developed and shared among these members of the same discourse community as the collective experiences of the people who live within this particular system (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000).

**Advantages of participant research.** There are distinct advantages to insider research that cannot be achieved by someone entering the case from outside of its structure. The participant researcher is not simply relegated to observing case phenomenon, but has the advantage of living and experiencing the structures that comprise the case. The participant researcher has background knowledge that may explain certain aspects of the case to which an outsider would not have access (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). This experiential and/or expanded knowledge provides information that would allow the person to make clearer connections between case study elements and potential causes and/or solutions that can be sensibly applied to the setting based on the full spectrum of information accessible only to a researcher who is also a participant in that particular setting (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). As a result, the participant researcher may conceivably be able to make more cohesive analyses and conclusions because of the advantage of living the case rather than simply observing it.

**Limitations of participant research.** The dual role of participant and researcher is oftentimes considered a limitation in that there is an assumed lack of objectivity, although objectivity is encouraged and expected in research. Such closeness to the occurrences within the case and the factors that make up the system can certainly result in limited objectivity. On the other hand, the advantages of possessing intimate knowledge about nuances that affect the case definitely counterbalance these limitations (Stake, 2000).

The current study inquired into a major curricular change process in one elementary school in a large Mid-western city where I collected the data as part of my normal workload for three years as the implementation occurred. As the researcher and the Literacy Coordinator, I was also a participant in the study in addition to staff, teachers, and other administrators at this one particular school. The other participants in the study observed me in the capacity of instructional coach, observer, administrator, and evaluator of teaching practices and program implementation. At that time, I had some responsibility for the hiring and firing of teachers and other school staff. After one year beyond the time the study took place, (4 years total), I left the school and the position. As a result, interviews were conducted with teachers after I no longer had any official authority over them. Nevertheless, the residual effects of my administrative status may have influenced their responses in some way. In addition, a portion of the interview referenced race, which may be uncomfortable for some people to address particularly in the presence of individuals from dissimilar racial backgrounds. Teacher participants may not have been completely forthright because of the reference to race, or because I had previously worked with them in a supervisory capacity. It is my hope, however, that I had built a level of trust with participating teachers and demonstrated that, as a former administrator and as a researcher, I valued reflection and growth as part of my professional learning process.

### **Reflexivity**

Reflexivity, in qualitative research, requires the researcher to be aware of his/her influence on the study (Shaw, 2010). The research process and outcomes are not separate from the researcher but filtered by the experiences, expectations, and desires of the

researcher. The reflexive researcher considers this perspective as she collects and interprets data and is cognizant and conscious about *an* effect, and can possibly specify and/or articulate *the* effect she has on the research as a whole with descriptions of the research context, her place in that context, as well as autobiographical information to allow for greater understanding of that researchers' perspective on the study (O'Reilly, 2009).

To this end, I am cognizant that my own autobiography has contributed to the lens through which I see the world. This particular lens, that of an African American woman working primarily with Black and Latino children and teachers in low-income, under-resourced schools, has definitely influenced my choice to focus on this particular topic. My desire for other teachers to have the tools and knowledge resources to teach reading to children considered 'at-risk' is influenced by the masses of capable, intelligent children I have seen over the years who struggled with reading, and consequently their own self-esteem and self-concept, simply because they were born into a family living in a neighborhood that fails to attract teachers with the experience and knowledge that will allow them to teach reading effectively. In addition, school improvement efforts to prepare these teachers are oftentimes ineffective which also contributes to the choice I made to examine the change process so as to learn from this particular instance of institutional change. I am also notably sensitive to the manner in which low reading achievement contributes to high school drop out rates and the devastating effects that dropping out of high school has on the life choices for African Americans from my experiences living and working in African American communities Allington, 2009; Fiester, 2010; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). This study was much more than

simply a dissertation but also my attempt to contribute something in the form of a solution to this destructive but persistent problem in Black communities and American society as a whole. To this end, no one can be completely aware of how the knowledge we possess impacts our responses towards certain subjects. An inherent limitation of reflexivity acknowledges that interpretation can be affected by experiences and awareness as I apply this understanding to my passionate perspective toward Black student achievement in the efforts to be a cognizant as possible of potential influences stemming from my prior experiences and viewpoints.

### **Critical Race Theory**

This research inquiry used a retrospective case study to describe the change process given that it already occurred. I looked back to consider a first-person account of my day-to-day reality as a Black literacy leader at an elementary school working with teachers to implement a course of action transitioning teacher practice, and school culture, from reliance on a scripted basal program to that which supports balanced literacy instruction. I described the study and my experiences as an African American woman in a school leadership position in first person narrative which inherently lends itself to Critical Race Theory (CRT), given that the process of describing one's own experiences in this manner empowers those belonging to marginalized groups, or the 'other.' This is a process of using self as both subject and object to impart one's own story (Harrison, 2009). Sol'orzano & Delgado Bernal (2001) suggest that storytelling, in accordance with CRT, can be used to convey the experiences of people of color in the social context in which they occur. In participant research, the author's voice is central to the narrative. There is either implied or explicit declaration that the personal narrative

instructs, disrupts, incites to action, or calls into question personal affairs, culture and self (Harrison, 2009). While this study considered the perspectives of the Literacy Coordinator and of the teachers, the insight I possess resulting from living as an African American woman in America brings a particular perspective and a viewpoint that can only be expressed by including my voice as part of the study.

### **Setting and Participants**

#### **Setting**

This case study occurred at a Title 1, K-8 elementary school in a very large urban city in the Midwest. The school is located in a predominately Black neighborhood containing mostly single-family homes. Some students from the surrounding neighborhood attend this school although most travel from neighborhoods all over the city. Parents who want their children to attend the school must submit an application to be randomly chosen at a publically held lottery. The student body consisted of 98% Black, 1% Latino, 1% other with 8% of the students qualifying for special education services. The school had made consistent academic gains in reading and math according to scores on state standardized assessments moving from reading and math scores in the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile to scores in the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile over a six-year time span.

#### **Researcher Participant**

As a participant in this study, I welcomed the opportunity to look back and consider my personal struggles with acceptance as a female, African American school leader in an environment that appeared to place a greater premium on males and Whiteness. Throughout my career, I have been involved in the change process on many

different levels primarily in low-achieving under resourced schools in low-income areas serving large populations of children of color. I was a classroom teacher for 15 years, a reading specialist, Reading First monitor for the state of Illinois, a new teacher Induction Coach, and an administrator during my 24 years in education. For the most part, the context for my experiences has been very consistent as I have primarily worked in schools that were involved in school improvement efforts on a consistent basis, which allowed me to participate in the change process on a variety of levels: as an observer, participant, and, ultimately, a designer and orchestrator. My active or passive participation as an African American woman in such change processes allowed me to contribute to, and benefit from school improvement efforts with a unique lens.

### **Teacher Participants**

The teacher participants were chosen because they were teaching at the school where I was hired for the purpose of transitioning the school from Open Court reading instruction to balanced literacy. Initially, I wanted to document this process for later reflection as a growth exercise for myself to inform the change process as it occurred. I also wanted to be able to replicate parts of the process to apply to other situations in the future knowing that, if I was successful, other schools and district leadership would be interested in employing the services of someone who successfully facilitated the transition from a scripted reading program to balanced literacy and could articulate how this process occurred. Finally, knowing what research says about the challenges of institutional change, I thought it would be helpful as a contribution to the educational

community as a whole, and more specifically to the reading community, regarding key aspects employed towards successful implementation of school improvement efforts.

### **Other Participants**

At the time of my employment in the focal school, the administrative team consisted of myself and three male administrators- one African American and two White. I was the only woman administrator serving as Literacy Coordinator. The school was staffed by 27 general education teachers, four special education teachers, and three full-release Lead Teachers whose provide instructional coaching and other quasi-administrative duties to support their assigned teachers. The school had experienced a fair amount of teacher turnover during the three years of this study, although there were 11 teachers who remained at the school during the focal three years of the study. Of these 11 teachers, all who were present at the school for the entire 3-year transition process were invited to participate in the study through interviews. Specific teacher demographic information regarding participants who were involved in the 3-year transition period includes the following: 6 African American females, 4 White females, 2 African American males, and 1 Hispanic female.

## **Data and Analysis**

### **Data Sources**

Stake (2000) informs that qualitative case studies often use multiple data sources in the effort to reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation through a process referred to as triangulation. Triangulation seeks to clarify meaning and verify interpretations by



highlighting the various ways certain phenomenon can be found within the study (Stake, 2000). In this qualitative case study, the multiple measures that were used to capture its details include classroom observation notes, internal documents (emails, professional development feedback, teacher surveys), official documents (memos, meeting minutes), personal artifacts (journal entries), as well as teacher interviews. These are all considered acceptable data for case study research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006).

Classroom observations included checklists used to provide teacher feedback on specific aspects of balanced literacy implementation and on open-ended, holistic descriptions of classroom activities and behaviors. Marshall and Rossman (1999) describe observation as a "...fundamental and highly important method in all qualitative inquiry: It is used to discover complex interactions in natural social settings" (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p.107). These researchers go on to say that observation, along with "...gathering and analyzing documents produced in the course of everyday events..." results in a rich portrayal of "...the values and beliefs of participants in the setting" (p.116).

The personal documents of the Literacy Coordinator were also considered in this study (journal entries, reminder notes, professional development outlines) that, provided in first-person narrative, offered a very intimate consideration of the process from the perspective of the Literacy Coordinator. Other data includes teacher interviews employing specifically designed questions to elicit responses about how they perceived the changes as they occurred (retrospectively), how they felt the events that took place during the change process affected their current planning and instruction in literacy, and whether they could see race playing a part in any part of the implementation process.

Only teachers who were present for all three years of the transition process were invited to participate in the survey.

### **Data Analysis**

Data from the observation notes, emails, professional development documents, and other relevant documents were read thoroughly and reviewed in keeping with the goal of examining the move from the use of the Open Court reading program towards the elements of balanced literacy as outlined by what is evident in the relevant documents. I examined these pieces for information that would indicate evidence that helped convey how the implementation process occurred from multiple perspectives and data points. I looked for themes that provided information regarding my actions and/or decision-making processes during the transition/implementation process. I questioned the data as follows: What items influenced my decision making process? Were my actions and/decisions dependent on teacher responses? Did teachers respond to my actions in any particular manner? Is there evidence that racialized perceptions of identity, along with expectations regarding leadership and roles played a part in the change process? Did teachers respond differently to me than the other male administrators? How did this manifest in the actions of the teachers or myself? Events and decisions that occurred and why certain things may have occurred within the change process were of particular interest, as well the components that, according to Meister (2000) result in increased student achievement. Those components included vision, collaboration, professional development, leadership and assessment of change as elements to consider when looking

for evidence of permanent, systemic change that contributes to advances in student achievement.

I then reviewed the documents again analyzing what Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe as open coding. In open coding, previously hidden and obscure concepts begin to surface as the researcher identifies the properties that connect the concepts together. These concepts become obvious as one reviews the actions and activities that emerge in the documents and how these begin to display an interrelatedness lending to categorical configurations. As the categories and subcategories evolved, I applied axial coding to these categories and subcategories because "... coding occurs around the axis of a category" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 123-124). Data analysis continued with the application of selective coding to integrate and refine categories that highlight themes and develop classifications that can be reexamined against the observation notes, emails, journal entries, professional development documents, and survey responses. Relevant documents were reviewed repeatedly to validate the research results thereby increasing the credibility and trustworthiness of the results.

### **Summary**

Chapter three described the research design, description of participants, data analysis, limitations, methods, and procedures used to recount a retrospective look at the transition from a basal program to balanced literacy instruction using a case study format. Chapter four will discuss relevant findings from the study that will be used to further expound upon and contribute to research question and sub-questions.

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Review

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I present the findings of my study through summaries of the seven teachers who served as participants in the interview process. I use these summaries as the means for organizing the data throughout the chapter. A section will be devoted to each teacher, and woven within the sections will be data from other sources (my personal literacy journal, annual teacher surveys, email archives) to add depth to the narrative created around the interview summaries. Woven through each subsection will be additional background details about the collaborators and their schools not provided in Chapter Three, descriptions of the collaborations, factors that facilitated collaboration, factors that helped the collaborations to grow and develop, obstacles that had to be overcome, if any, and perceived impact.

A review of the raw data (interviews) revealed a series of themes from the similar topics that came up in my conversations with participating teachers. All teachers answered the interview questions but in doing so, expounded upon certain topics more than others. As a result, a few themes were common among all teachers, but these commonalities were not consistent enough to present the data thematically. Therefore, I chose to report the data as summaries of teacher interviews, identifying themes emerging from those discussions.

I have organized this chapter in chronological order according to when the interviews occurred. Participants shared more information about certain research topics than others, which will be evident in the interview narratives. Structurally, the

collaborations varied in length of conversation, the amount of detail provided around each topic discussed, and the personal experiences that could be used to support the description of their interview responses. Therefore, the following sections are not visually similar. In addition, pseudonyms were used for each participating teacher instead of actual teacher names to protect participant identities.

Before launching into the teachers' narratives, however, I would like to begin with my own story as a means of situating this discussion at the initial stages of the implementation process and as the foundation for this study's focal process. I believe it is important to contextualize the teachers' stories with my own as I prepared for what would become my "Dream Job". These preparations occurred before I entered the school building and before teachers arrived to begin their work towards balanced literacy implementation.

### **Educator Stories**

#### **Kimberly**

The path towards the work in which I would participate for this study was paved with a background that included a strong preparation and experience in balanced literacy instruction and Open Court. I had a different perspective of Open Court because I began working with the program earlier in my career, but after completing a Master's degree in Literacy and Language, as well as a reading specialist credential. With my reading background to frame my perspective, I viewed Open Court as a program with some strong, research-supported components, as well as with some weaknesses. For example, its phonics portion was explicit, systematic, and comprehensive, so I followed it closely based on these strengths. The writing component was nearly non-existent, so our teacher

leadership team worked to supplement the writing portion with a school-wide writing rubric and Writing Workshop. Another major shortcoming of the program was the lack of balance between whole group instruction and small group instruction. The program almost exclusively promoted whole group instruction and independent practice via program workbooks, while lacking attention to differentiation. Because of these prior in-depth, personal experiences with Open Court, I had a strong grasp of what was necessary to support a transition away from the program expectations. This information helped me tremendously, as I was able to anticipate what aspects of literacy on which to focus, and the appropriate order on which to focus on these aspects based on these strengths and weaknesses of the program.

**The interview process.** The first of three interviews for the focal Literacy Coordinator position in this study provided me with its overarching task and responsibility, namely, transitioning a school from Open Court to balanced literacy instruction. The school was described as a “good” school that had the potential to be “great”. As noted, I had previously used both Open Court and balanced literacy, so I had a vast amount of experiential knowledge from a teaching perspective. In addition, I had a systems perspective given that I had also worked with principals, literacy coaches, and teachers in the implementation of effective balanced literacy systems and practices as a Reading First consultant for the state. I felt this was my chance to put into practice what I had been recommending to school personnel in years prior. Simply speaking, it was an opportunity to “put my money where my mouth was,” as I eager to prove that my previous recommendations had merit.

In preparation for my second of three interviews for this position, I was required to create a year-long plan outlining the transition which included the following:

- First Quarter-Writing Workshop
- Second Quarter-Comprehension and Literacy Centers
- Third Quarter-Guided Reading
- Fourth Quarter- Phonics and Differentiation

I felt fully prepared to complete this work based on my detailed knowledge of both instructional approaches what is needed to create effective literacy systems. I remembered how Open Court was a highly structured system, and that the transition process would, in essence, involve a ‘weaning’ from this scripted program. However, as I planned to incrementally take away Open Court components, I was conscious of the need to equip teachers with knowledge of instructional aspects and materials that would replace those components in their instruction. The third interview led to an official offer for the Literacy Coordinator position as the interviewers acknowledged my preparedness for the responsibilities of this position based on my reading expertise and previous experiences teaching Open Court and balanced literacy.

**Initial stages of implementation.** Implementation began with a high level of excitement and anxiety for me. I was aware of how monumental the task was as I prepared for those very first professional development (PD) activities, which was an exercise in maintaining my sanity. Oftentimes I felt panic rising within me as I considered the complexity of issues that were involved in an undertaking of this magnitude. I was concerned about how the staff would receive me, being aware that these first impressions could directly affect implementation success. My goal was to publicly

position myself as a collaborator--someone working side by side with the teachers as we navigated our way through this transition together. At the start, teachers seemed to receive me positively as they appeared on the surface, cordial and agreeable. Underneath, though, I perceived an undercurrent of hostility that increased as time went on.

Initially, teachers provided thoughtful and constructive feedback after PD sessions that warranted reflection and consideration for later planning. These examples included the following:

- I need consistent support throughout the year, not just PD's
- Encourage us to remember to believe and to instill that in our kids
- I think everyone is excited to improve and to become more effective at meeting the needs of our children. We are on board! We look forward to working with you Ms. Chase!
- How can I see this in action? Can you show me this with MY class in MY classroom?
- I could use more time to work with my grade level team.
- I appreciate having the time to read the manual during PD.
- Can Writer's Workshop people come back for further support at a later time?
- I need assistance with grading.

Within the first three months of the implementation, teachers stopped providing post-PD feedback, something I reflected on in my personal literacy journal:

*I'm feeling good about many things-Observations (looking for conferences), coaching conversations, higher vocabulary scores (read alouds!), PD's (I think?), extra support for people who need it, modeling lessons. I don't really*



*know how my PD's are affecting the teachers because I get very little feedback. Correction-NO feedback. No matter the prompting, inviting, coercing, blah, blah, blah, they stopped providing feedback. Challenge #2- Getting feedback in this culture of, um, apathy?*

The culture was not one of apathy, so I thought, but one that was seething with discontent under the surface.

During the initial stages of the implementation I felt fully supported by the leadership team, which consisted of instructional coaches and other members of the administration. However, relationships between teachers and the leadership were strained, as there was definitely an “Us vs. Them” atmosphere. Teacher reactions towards me reinforced this combative environment that seemed to already exist between teachers and leadership, and although the severity of the attacks reduced after the first year, the low-grade animosity and resistance never subsided completely. I was able to establish closer relationships over time with certain teachers, and productive relationships with most of the other teachers, but this did not occur with the entire teaching staff. In a very short time, I began to feel the effects of this stressful environment even as I remained focused on important aspects of the implementation as documented in my personal literacy journal:

*There's so much swirling around in my head about, not just literacy stuff, but next level literacy stuff. First, today was good but stressful. I have been dealing with a persistent knot in my neck off and on (mostly on) but it just disappeared (not completely) this weekend. On Wednesday, the day of PD, I woke up with the knot back in my back. Hurts so bad sometimes.*

*But magically, when PD began, the knot dissipated almost completely. Therein lies the challenge; handling the stress associated with PD. What is the stress about, really?*

The Literacy Coordinator position was one I took incredibly seriously, even to the point where I began to be physically affected by the significance I placed on my duties in this particular role, particularly as the professional development coordinator. I considered professional development to be at the crux of this change process that was my responsibility, thus professional development had to be done effectively. I drew upon all of my professional development training and experiences in my attempts to create a series of informative, research-based, interactive training sessions to equip teachers with theoretical and practical knowledge of best practices in balanced literacy. To ensure that I would be as effective as possible in this role, I began to keep a personal literacy journal as a means to reflect on my practice and make improvements as needed. The charge to transition a school from Open Court, a scripted reading program, to balanced literacy instruction, required a major shift in teacher knowledge of literacy strategies and instruction. Performing the essential duties of a Literacy Coordinator was crucial in leading this transition.

**The duties of the Literacy Coordinator.** As stated in Chapter 1, the Literacy Coordinator has a greater opportunity to make a greater impact on the school community and literacy culture of the school than any of other roles listed under the reading professionals outlined by the IRA (2007). My listed duties as a Literacy Coordinator, as indicated in Table 4.1, were considerable and further exemplifies the opportunity I had as Literacy Coordinator to effect change in my school. This list includes actions to be

expected from all levels of the reading professional spectrum, with the additional responsibility of providing administrative support. I planned for and conducted targeted small group instruction during guided reading, as would a Reading Specialist. I observed instruction, modeled instructional practices, provided resources, and planned professional development, as would a Literacy Coach. As a Literacy Coordinator, I also organized literacy systems for maximum effectiveness (scheduling, lesson plan templates, etc.), designed the literacy program to include an integration with the Common Core State Standards and content area subjects, created a Scope and Sequence as a curriculum guideline for teachers to follow and to ensure grade level alignment for literacy expectations, and negotiated (sometimes fought for) professional development time to maintain a continuous support for balanced literacy instruction.

The list is separated into duties that were directly related to balanced literacy implementation and duties that would be considered generally administrative in nature. It clearly indicates that the bulk of my activities in this role as a Literacy Coordinator directly impacted balanced literacy implementation in some manner. The intensity of the beginning stages of the implementation process required that I would spend up to about 90% of my time involved in balanced literacy-related activities. As the implementation years progressed and instructional approaches became systematized, I accepted more responsibility for items that were indirectly related or unrelated to balanced literacy implementation. Towards the third year, as more teachers demonstrated their understanding of the literacy expectations, my duties then shifted towards a deeper, more complex understandings of best literacy practices such as differentiation, while also supporting other school-wide initiatives, such as unit plans and instructional coaching.

The actions, activities, and duties listed in Table 2 below provide an extensive, but not comprehensive list of activities to meet teachers' needs as the Literacy Coordinator during the transition. The list is divided into a) activities that supported and maintained balanced literacy implementation (Table 2); and b) activities that did not directly support the balanced literacy program (Table 3); although I performed all duties as one of the administrators in the building.

In the midst of enacting these decisions, I continuously searched for outcomes that would indicate that we, as a school, were moving closer to our goal, or vision of a well-prepared teaching staff equipped with the knowledge and awareness to be able to choose appropriate assessments, collect and analyze that assessment data, then plan and implement data-driven balanced literacy instruction that resulted in increased student achievement as well as fostered a love for literacy in our students. During the introductory PDs at the beginning of the implementation, I attempted to establish this shared vision regarding what we could all agree on, as a school that would indicate successful implementation. At the time, teachers appeared to have accepted and supported the vision we all determined was that of a school that supported a balanced literacy philosophy and instructional ethos. The feedback from this PD was incredibly positive, with some insightful questions and encouraging statements including requests to revisit our shared vision later in the implementation process.

Earlier in the implementation process, we worked toward establishing this goal as a school-wide vision of success during a few professional development sessions. I found it difficult, however, to return to this literacy vision that we had begun to identify and refine because of the many topics on our professional development schedule that were

Table 2

*Duties that Supported Balanced Literacy*

---

- Created and managed the professional development schedule for the year. Acted as the ‘gatekeeper’ for Professional Development (PD)
  - Maintained the transition to Balanced Literacy (BL) through phases. I rethought the speed of the phases when they appeared to be moving too fast for the teachers. (year one only)
  - Differentiated PD
  - Supervised the media position and ensured that there was congruence and reciprocity between media lessons and classroom literacy lessons.
  - Hired and supervised the Response to Intervention (RTI) Coordinator which consisted of mostly reading intervention.
  - Designed classroom reading intervention program for students performing below benchmark levels for their grade
  - Attended student author celebrations as a way to encourage the writing program.
  - Ordered all materials for the literacy program
  - Chaired the Literacy Committee (two years)
  - Insuring that every student had a book to read, at their level, at all times
  - Worked one-on-one with Special Education teachers
  - Collected and monitored assessment data, as well as prepared teachers to analyze and deliver appropriate small group, differentiated instruction which was matched with a network goal of providing data-driven instruction
  - Involved teachers in leading PD--building capacity
  - Supported teachers system-wide with PD literacy development workshops
  - Modeled teaching strategies (to teachers)
  - Regularly observed in classrooms, collected classroom data, and planned PD around the observed instructional needs of the teachers
  - Managed the implementation of all curricula except math
  - Coordinated the implementation of the Common Core State Standards
  - Monitored data analysis of benchmark assessments (Benchmark Assessment System and Words Their Way)
  - High teacher turnover led to a continuous, year-long focus on providing new teacher training on basic balanced literacy practices in addition to regularly scheduled professional development sessions
  - Managed outside literacy programs such as Real Men Read and summer programs offered at our partner library
  - Supervised Literacy Night including organizing and overseeing its committee
-

Table 3  
*Duties Unrelated to the Support of Balanced Literacy*

- 
- Managed the coaching/mentoring program for the first year because of my background in coaching and preparing coaches (year one only); participated in coaching training and activities to support the coaching program the remaining years
  - Modeled coaching strategies (to coaches onsite)
  - Periodically supported coaches in the network with PD coaching workshops
  - Participated in PD and collaborative meetings with other leadership in the network, as well as in book clubs with a focus on professional literature
  - Conducted teachers' formal evaluations as a required by their union agreement (years two and three only)
  - Created unit plan and lesson plan template for the school, as well as monitored implementation of this portion of teachers' evaluations
  - Contributed to leadership decisions regarding implementation of network edicts
  - Actively recruited new students at the charter school fair
  - Supervised an all school poetry presentation as the culmination of poetry month
- 

also necessary to equip teachers with the tools to enact practices that would move us towards our vision. I was hopeful that we had done enough work so that everyone would hold themselves individually accountable for carrying out this vision, and that this shared responsibility for continuing our vision would serve as internal motivation when the change process became difficult.

While I did not bring vision back as a focus during subsequent professional development sessions, I promoted it by sending email reminders to teachers to prepare for upcoming professional development topics, such as:

*Today's PD topic will focus on assessing and grading your student writing.*

*Please bring the following to today's PD session:*

*1) Two (2) student notebooks or writing folders*

2) *Your conferring records or notes you have been collecting regarding your student writing, particularly any notes for the student writing you bring.*

3) *The rubrics you have been using to assess your writing*

4) *A welcoming smile for our presenter :-)*

I observed classroom instruction on certain aspects of balanced literacy to support our literacy vision:

*Ms. Chase will be visiting SPED, Primary, 4th, and other grades as time permits. The observation focus will include the Writer's Workshop components (Mini-lesson, Independent Writing Time, Share) and, most specifically, conferring.*

I continuously provided feedback to teachers that would advance their practice and movement towards our literacy vision as evidenced by the examples below:

*Feedback for Teacher #1*

*I enjoyed observing you teaching your students the difference between a 'seed' story and a 'watermelon' story yesterday morning. The lesson was very good! Specifically, the language you used during instruction appeared to be purposeful and exemplary of the kind of language to be used during Writing Workshop mini-lessons (Lucy would be so proud!) Also, each component of Writing Workshop was clear and evident from your language and activities.*

*Please continue teaching in the manner in which I observed and your students will learn a great deal about themselves as writers this*

*year. I would like to encourage you to continue to improve your writing instruction with a couple recommendations that I would like to see you implement in the next few weeks.*

- *I saw that you are conducting student conferences. Make sure you are recording your conference notes to record your student conferences. These are helpful as we reflect on individual student progress and your own instruction.*
- *I also observed that you are implementing the Mid-Workshop Teaching Point during Independent Writing time. Try to limit your Mid-Workshop Teaching Point to only one point as they write. This way, you can focus on a very powerful teaching point that students may be more likely to remember*

#### *Feedback for Teacher #2*

*I enjoyed the opportunity to observe your literacy centers today. **You are off to a great start!** I observed several things that will contribute to student independence, which will allow you to get focus your attention on your guided reading groups. Some things I saw that were going well were:*

- *A center ‘pre-brief’ where you gathered students together to talk about your centers and the expectations*
- *You walked around as an observer during center time, listening to*



*and answering student questions while monitoring student behavior*

- *A center ‘debrief’ where you reviewed behaviors and had students self-assess center outcomes*
- *Center procedures and expectations seemed to be clearly understood by students as evidenced by their attentive listening during the pre-brief, on-task behavior during center activities, and post-center debrief (giving their assessment of how they thought centers went with a thumbs up, etc.)*

*I also had some suggestions that, I think, would really enhance your already well-established path towards student independence. Please note: These are really just suggestions and not requirements but I think they would serve you well.*

- *I noticed students had additional questions about the listening center. This is a perfect opportunity to address potential student confusions by posting rules in each center, specifically the listening center, like you have for your portable centers. They were very helpful in your portable centers and I can only see them being just as useful in your more stable centers as well. (Also, you might want to add “One bag for two people” or something like that in the phonics (onset-rime) center to cut down on that confusion. That’s an easy one to fix.)*
- *I noticed that you told students where they should go for centers as*

*you read from the management board. This is a valuable skill students could learn themselves that would greatly increase their independence. Can students see your management board clearly? Do you need to enlarge the words, use icons, or move the board to a more accessible place?*

- *Your center debrief activities are incredibly useful to get students to be thoughtful of their own behavior and actions in their centers. Do you think center norms, for every center, would be useful here to have something to refer back to when they self-assess? For example, students mentioned being too noisy, others not staying on task, etc. Those could be perfect general center norms to refer back to when you have them assess their own behavior in the groups. Some other examples could be ‘Get along with others, Share, Ask 3 before me, Follow center rules’ etc.*

*Let me know what you think about these suggestions. You and your students are right where you should be with centers and in anticipation for guided reading. Let me know if I can help in any way.*

*Feedback for Teacher #3*

*Thank you for signing up for a coaching cycle! This is a great way to take control of your professional growth because we will focus only on the areas in which you would like to improve and or/explore further. Since you indicated that you would like to begin with a Coaching Conversation, I would like to set up our first meeting to talk about what you would like to*

*focus on during our work together. **Please respond below to give me some options for times** to meet (preps, days you are available after school), and I'll work with the times you give me to schedule our first coaching visit. Also, **please provide me with a topic** that you would like our initial focus to be on so that I can have some resources available that may help guide our conversation.*

As evidenced by these examples of email reminders and feedback, it is apparent how the intersection between the roles of Literacy Coach and administrator overlapped as I moved fluidly and deliberately between traditional Literacy Coach activities (coaching) and traditional administrator activities (observation and feedback with recommendations/expectations for improvement). There were elements of self-assessment and self-reflection involved as teachers determined the topic of focus for their coaching cycles. In the meantime, there were also items and/or practices that I determined, as an administrator, were necessary for teachers to implement based on my efforts to move our literacy practice closer to that which would fulfill our shared vision of ideal balanced literacy instruction.

**The effects of racism.** I believe that the implementation process was affected by race and the ways in which some people view African Americans in power. At times, some teachers responded in ways that were disrespectful and dismissive, which was allowed under the guise of 'giving teachers a voice' even when the 'voice' that teachers sometimes used was oppressive and belittling. I was aware that the school environment could be negative and dysfunctional, but it seemed much more so towards persons of color in leadership. For example, a female teacher reported a conversation I had with a

male teacher as sexual harassment to the principal. The male teacher himself, who had not reported the conversation, stood up and declared that the conversation was taken completely out of context. Additionally, teachers signed a “grievance” against another African American woman on the leadership team claiming she did not say good morning and was unfriendly. Members of a particular grade level resisted my efforts to observe their writing instruction and declared they would not teach writing for the remainder of the year. The principal sanctioned this decision. These examples are but a few of the many that occurred over the three-year implementation period. During this time, the other White leadership team members performed their professional duties without the threat of persecution. Incidences such as these would emerge periodically as a constant reminder that the African American leaders were scrutinized more harshly than our White colleagues.

### **Teacher Interviews**

#### **Darlene**

Darlene had prior knowledge of balanced literacy from teacher education courses although she had not yet applied this knowledge to her classroom instruction. Before implementation began at our school, Darlene was already in agreement with balanced literacy practices and beliefs, but had only used a reading program in the past to teach literacy.

**Understanding implementation.** Darlene recounted her perceptions of my expectations in the following manner, “What you said, what you did, what you wanted, it tied together,” indicating that the process by which implementation of balanced literacy

occurred made sense to her and that it was coherent and systematic. I purposefully planned to cover topics during professional development that were connected to school initiatives, and expanded or improved upon previous topics. She further explained, “...there always [was] a reason [for what] we were doing. It wasn’t just something that you were just coming off of your head”. I questioned whether teachers, especially at the beginning of my work at the school, would simply trust that balanced literacy was a much more comprehensive manner of teaching literacy without more time to establish my credibility yet. For this reason, I purposefully provided research support as a means to establish credibility, given that an external research-based rationale for this transition might be more acceptable to the teachers. In fact, for each PD session I included a piece of professional literature from a research journal or from literacy resources authored by influential contributors to the field such as Fountas and Pinnel, Richard Allington, Lucy Calkins, Douglas Fischer, Nancy Frey, and P. David Pearson. Looking back, I consciously considered the fact that I was a Black woman, and for this reason, lacked credibility with these teachers, which was part of the reason I felt it necessary to support my implementation efforts with well-recognized literacy researchers.

**Items that helped implementation.** Darlene noted that working in smaller groups in the optional, afterschool workshops I conducted was helpful, as this supported her attempts to learn about the components of balanced literacy on a deeper level. She also mentioned, very simply, that having the opportunity to apply what she had learned over the years in professional development was an additionally beneficial, stating:

...like anything just needs application and you need -- over years, you get better, you know, and of course, like a first year person is not going to be

able to do what somebody who's been doing the same program for four or five years. It's application.

**Items that hindered implementation.** Darlene also mentioned items that worked against the implementation process. She noted the long hours spent at the school as teachers were often in the building from 6:30 am until 6:30 pm given the increasing amount of responsibilities placed on them each year. Another teacher supported this sentiment on her annual teacher survey:

Moral (sic) this year has dropped to an all-time low and teachers are not happy to come to work, and both their personal and professional lives have been affected. There does not seem enough time in the day to do all that needs to be done. I keep my focus on my students and the job at hand. I often times feel overwhelmed and for the first time at [this school] I have felt a failure. I spend way to (sic) much time trying to do useless paperwork that does not help me in the classroom.

Another difficulty Darlene highlighted was that of classroom management, as she had had some challenging student behaviors in her classroom in the past. She felt that this was an issue that worked against implementation efforts since balanced literacy allowed students to practice certain skills independently. Understandably, a classroom with behavior problems would realize some challenges, particularly during transitions or independent practice times, unless the teacher's management system is clearly communicated to, and followed by the students.

According to Darlene, race did not play a role in implementation efforts, although she acknowledged that people saw me in a negative light. She stated that veteran teachers

who had been at the school for a longer time period were among the those who continued to teach the way they taught before the implementation process began, or in the manner in which they were most comfortable. Darlene surmised that it was more the person's personality that dictated whether they would implement literacy directives than any response based on race: "It's a matter of individualized thing. If you're going to do it with fidelity, you're going to do -- with fidelity, if you're not you're not. You got to do what you want to do."

Something that would have helped in the implementation was consistency among administrators because, she stated, it was clear that different members of the administrative staff had different expectations. There appeared to be a distinct and confusing inconsistency in messages from the school-based administrative staff. Darlene acknowledged that this factor made it hard to stick with what one administrator said to do when another administrator required something different. This situation is a clear indication that our administrative team had not collectively embraced the vision for literacy success.

In sum, I feel the following statement underscored the general culture of the school, which influenced peoples' feelings and responses to the implementation efforts: "I just feel like people perceived everything negatively".

### **Evelyn**

Evelyn's prior knowledge of reading instruction was based on participation in an alternative certification program that she felt left her ill-prepared to teach literacy in the classroom. She also worked at a different school the previous year that made use of a

scripted literacy program. Because of the absence of an established literacy pedagogy in her teacher preparation program, Evelyn felt a need to compensate for her lack of knowledge about strong literacy instruction, and thus, during instructional times not addressed by the program manual, defaulted to the way she was taught literacy as a child.

**Responses to implementation.** Evelyn was initially excited about the implementation of balanced literacy and had positive feelings about it, considering this to be an opportunity to learn “something new about literacy”. The mindset of her colleagues, however, “was that it was bullshit” which made it difficult to maintain this excitement. In fact, her colleagues shared these negative and discouraging comments with her:

- It’s too much.
- I am not doing this.
- She is crazy. Who had the time do all this?
- Where would we get the resources to do this?
- My students can’t do this.

She noted that these teachers verbalized their views regarding balanced literacy instruction consistently throughout the three years of implementation.

Evelyn felt particularly supported by the incremental nature of the roll out, and described it as the “PD that built off of previous PDs”, referencing the way that each component was thoroughly reviewed for an extended amount of time before moving to the next professional development topic consisting of a subsequent balanced literacy component. This was helpful to Evelyn, a teacher who felt she lacked a deep, working



knowledge of literacy instruction, but with the desire to learn it for the sake of her students. To further explicate her thoughts, Evelyn stated:

I really felt like it was baby-stepped, if you will, where a teacher could get comfortable in gaining the knowledge to implement that in the class...[the literacy coordinator then] increased the expectations week after week after week.

**Implementation supports.** Features of the implementation that Evelyn insisted were particularly supportive, however, were structures that resulted in increased interaction between teachers. These structures included collaboration, small group work (grade level), coaching, after school workshops (small numbers of participants), and opportunities for dialogue and questioning (during PD). I think it is also important to include her mention of the level of rapport she and I developed at the beginning of the three years, which allowed us to communicate freely, and again, brings attention to how personal interaction supported her during this process. Evelyn also mentioned modeling, videos, and simply having opportunities to practice and perfect those practices as instrumental for increasing her ability to implement balanced literacy.

In alignment with Evelyn's method of learning, she indicated that one-on-one coaching and modeling enhanced her opportunities to learn during the implementation. Not surprisingly, she indicated the activities that would have improved the implementation process for her were processes that involved interaction such as more modeling, more coaching, and more feedback. Evidently, my feedback proved particularly helpful for her based on the following statement:

You know, the feedback and observations were always valuable and it was always on point on what your expressed expectation was of us as teachers.

I wish I would have more though. I wish I would have maybe observed more and [been] offered more feedback.

Evelyn rejected the isolating nature of teaching and referenced it as a factor that can discourage teachers from doing their best for their students: “Teaching can become so isolated-- when you are isolated like that you can get lazy, you can get lazy.”

**Hindrances to implementation.** Interestingly, comments from the principal, who was probably the most influential member of the administrative staff and who claimed to have a desire to see the implementation process occur successfully, encouraged teachers to instruct in whatever ways they felt necessary, even if that meant deviating away from the balanced literacy instruction that we were working so hard to establish. Evelyn’s statement offered some understanding of why more teachers did not invite me into their classrooms, “[the principal] would say like, when you close your classroom door you can do whatever you would want to do in there.”

Evelyn’s exchanges with teachers very likely influenced her beliefs about school culture at that time as she noted that,

- The culture in the building was negative (not just toward PD).
- The culture in the school, there was not a lot of positivity about the administrators period.

If the overall culture of the building was negative, and feelings toward all administrators were negative, then teachers would have responded negatively regardless of who was presenting. Therefore, these statements do not support the fact that there were negative

responses to my PDs while there were positive reactions to presentations that others conducted (e.g., teachers, assistant principals, principals, outside presenters). Teachers typically displayed resistance to professional development when I was the facilitator. Evelyn suggested that teachers rejected some aspects of balanced literacy practice because of they were viewed as directives that came from me, or "...because the expectation that came from you verbally."

**Racial remarks and resistance.** Evelyn remarked that she overheard teachers making disparaging comments about my hair, "...she's standing up there you know with her afro, trying to tell me what I need to do in my classroom." This demonstrated that some teachers responded to me in a manner that was certainly different from the way they responded to other presenters, as these types of remarks were not evident when referring to others who conducted professional development. Her recollections included:

As opposed to [them] calling [you] Ms. Chase, you know, you might be called Afro Lady or afro something to that effect, you know, which is, you know, supposed to be a dig at how you look or the presentation of your hair. This was from other African Americans. I have never heard of things from teachers who are not African American.

While I was oblivious to the characterization of my hairstyle, I was fully aware of the negative attitudes towards literacy and towards my leadership. I do remember the entire three years being a struggle to keep moving forward with the implementation efforts in this negative environment. These feelings were captured in my journal during the first year when the resistance was most evident and nearly debilitating:

*I thought about working and planning PD today and got a tinge of really not wanting to do it anymore. Wonder what that's about? Could be the feedback I received where teachers said I don't know anything about Writer's Workshop? PD's have been too much talking and give them more time in their rooms? And my expectations are unreasonable for Writer's Workshop (although everyone is implementing Writers Workshop in their classrooms) and for balanced literacy. I got really, really salty with them as a result of this info. A bunch of evil, miserable, vindictive bitches at that school. One takeaway, I guess, being that they still don't see the value in this change process. Revisit vision?*

Evelyn went on to acknowledge that at first, some teachers only minimally implemented the balanced literacy program as outlined. She saw more fidelity to implementation expectations and an impact on student outcomes as we moved towards the third year: "I saw more implementation of what was being expected and I saw more successes, not just with the teachers, but with the kids. I saw more success of what was being implemented as well."

### **Denise**

Denise described herself as a person who appreciated and preferred structure. She began as a relatively new teacher and had some previous classroom management challenges. I believe both of these experiences influenced her reaction to using the Open Court program and the transition away from it. She admitted that because she was new to

the school and experiencing challenges at maintaining an effective behavior management system, she made a 'compromise' of sorts toward the use of Open Court.

**Open Court.** Denise was an avid reader and loved reading and books and thus, preferred literacy instruction which incorporated rich literature. While Open Court did not promote this type of instruction, its emphasis on whole group instruction encouraged a teacher-directed classroom that helped resolve some of her anxiety about behavior problems. To that end, Denise states the following: "I was concerned with, like, I will not have kids walk all over me. Oh, this is all scripted? Great. I can focus my energy onto like, building the community and working on the discipline aspect of it." Teaching with Open Court however, presented some philosophical challenges for Denise in that she disagreed with the content offered in the Open Court program. She noted that the content was limiting in its literature options, while instruction included mostly whole group or teacher lectures, as well as workbook practice. In fact, Denise stated: "It was, it was pretty boring-- the story was so short, that by the time they were really getting into it, if it was a good one, then the story ended".

According to Denise, Open Court served a valuable purpose for a new teacher in that she did not have to wonder if the way she was teaching reading was the 'right' way at this new school. Following the Open Court program provided a sanctioned manner to implement reading instruction, which was obviously acceptable in this new assignment. Any changes to this method of curriculum of instruction would be hard to challenge as a novice teacher in a new school. The trade off was that Denise could reserve that mental energy and the time that would have been used to plan reading instruction to focus instead on classroom structures and management procedures.

**Reactions to balanced literacy.** When balanced literacy instruction was introduced, Denise's desire for structure led to a significant amount of discomfort at moving away from a familiar, scripted program that she disagreed with, even though she believed in the underlying theoretical perspectives and instructional methods of a balanced literacy program. It took the reactions of her students (and parents) to become excited about reading actual literature, and to warm up to its transition into the classroom.

For me it's just about like being comfortable with it. And feeling good about it. And then, just seeing their excitement, and being able to like or, old kids, I guess, would come back and be like, "Oh did you read that book with them yet?" And their parents too, would be like, "Oh my daughter doesn't like to read. But then, she can't stop reading. And she's bringing books home, and she's like picking reading as an activity."

Denise remembered a PD topic about ways to continue engaging students in wide reading activities with rich literature that occurred after the implementation of balanced literacy started as follows:

I think one of my favorite things that really stuck with me was we talked a lot about the vocabulary acquisition, of kids. And we looked at the articles, and we looked at how just reading, for a specific amount of minutes, how many different words they would know.

This knowledge encouraged her to embrace her own beliefs about how kids improve their reading and begin to put this belief into practice with confidence.

Because Denise finds comfort in structure, she enthusiastically grasped organizational and instructional balanced literacy structures, such as the mini-lesson

format and Reading and Writer's Workshop, although it was a still challenge for her to get to a place of confidence using balanced literacy components within these structures. Her desire for structure did not change, nor her belief that literacy learning should include rich, literature as evidenced by the following: "I saw a way to fit in, like, just really good literature. Stories that I was excited to read. Stories that they got super in to. Where, you know, we stopped reading, and they're like, "NO, read some more."

**Shifts in beliefs and behaviors.** While Denise maintained some of her previous views, she also realized some significant shifts in her teaching behaviors and beliefs that were directly related to her expanding knowledge of balanced literacy instruction. Before balanced literacy, Denise's idea of a 'good' classroom was one that was completely quiet. She began to understand that learning could actually occur in a noisy classroom where students read to each other, talked about stories, and participated in accountable talk, all activities that were enhanced when she implemented balanced literacy practices into her classroom. She articulated this realization in the conversation below:

Denise (D): When I had the basal. And we all had the same ten words. Every week. But then I was just like thinking, "Well that's so funny that they all had the same list. They should've never."

Kimberly (K): So your beliefs being that, a good classroom, or a classroom, where you are the most effective is the classroom where you have all of the control.

D: Yeah.

K: That was your belief. Okay.

D: Control and silence, which sounds really terrible.

As evidenced above, not only did Denise change her position about “control and silence” as the indicator of good classrooms, but also her beliefs about traditional spelling instruction. Her reflections are incredibly insightful in that she responds with disbelief at her own practices as a teacher using Open Court—all before she became familiar with balanced literacy instruction.

**Professional development.** Denise attributed professional development to be an integral part of the implementation process, stating that, “The professional development was, was key. You have to have that”. Her recollection of how PD occurred included the focus on research, which served to provide a rationale for the school’s transition and helped her embrace the implementation process. Regarding this, Denise stated:

I remember you started out with a lot of like, why. Why are we doing this?

There was a lot of like, “Research shows.” And you know, “This is the idea behind it.” And so, like, there, it made sense on why we were moving, to that direction.

Denise also remembered professional development topics occurring in stages, with topics introduced in increments and covered in depth: “And it was, like it was very, like, we did a chunk at a time.” This manner of implementation was favorable for her in that she embraced opportunities to practice different balanced literacy components in the classroom in small amounts, which helped her refine the different pieces of balanced literacy in a systematic manner:

And we looked at it in depth, instead of being like, “Well we’re going to do, guided reading, and we’re going to do BAS (Benchmark Assessment



System) testing and ‘Words their Way.’ And just like all of that thrown out would’ve been a lot. So it was good to work on, like piece by piece.

At one point during the three-year implementation period, I observed that Denise’s classroom instruction represented components of the gradual release of responsibility, such as direct instruction, modeling, and guided practice, that are often used as a part of balanced literacy instruction. As a result, I asked her to showcase her instruction during a professional development gathering. This practice not only helped other teachers by displaying peer modeling of effective literacy instruction, but also aided Denise in acquiring more confidence in her ability to implement balanced literacy instruction, while also nurturing her growth as a teacher leader. About this, she stated:

I remember like I presented at a PD one time. And I, actually like, modeled a balanced literacy lesson. And I just remember thinking like that was really kind of cool. Because, I felt like we had come a long way at that point.

**Implementation challenges.** Denise admitted that although that she still had trouble realizing high test scores even after implementing balanced literacy, she was encouraged to adhere to her beliefs that balanced literacy is an effective way to teach reading and that kids improve their reading without necessarily realizing stellar test scores. She stated, “it just felt right” to her. This presented a real problem though, because she stated that she did not want to be “called out” and humiliated in professional development meetings because of the lack of reading growth in her students.

This fear of public humiliation was one of the factors that Denise detailed as a hindrance that kept her and other teachers from fully investing in the implementation process, and explained her thought process below:

“You know, if I don’t do what I know gives me results, then I’m going to get called out in front of everyone, and humiliated when my scores are the way they are. I feel like we always got to that point in the year, in like, January. Where you were told like, “Well, scores are bad. So just go to your room and close the door, and do what you know you need to do.”

Again, Denise referenced the messages from the principal in which he encouraged teachers to move away from balanced literacy instruction as a response to test scores that did not necessarily show the gains of previous years. However, lowered scores are to be expected whenever a new program is implemented, and as teacher knowledge and the effective enactment of said knowledge takes time to catch up to instructional application and student learning. For most rational, thinking individuals, this pressure alone was sufficient reason to revert back to following a scripted program so that one would not have to feel humiliated and the need to justify their own instructional choices. Rather, they could simply attribute such losses to the program and its directives. Denise discussed her perspective on the principal’s prompting:

D: “Go in your room, close your door. Go in your room.” That said to me, find all of your workbooks, and start making copy after copy after copy. And teach your kids how to fill in bubbles and how to make the good guesses. And teach test-taking skills... not reading skills, not literacy skills.... Do I start making these copies and drilling worksheets?” Like,

and it was then this sort of, like, “Well how do you make both of those things mesh? Because they don’t.”

K: So what did that mean to you?

D: Go back to what we were doing before... when we were successful and using Open Court.

Unfortunately, the struggle over meaningful instruction and requirements to constantly raise test scores is real and quite common. Denise portrayed this struggle as one between her own self-preservation and the best interests of her students as it relates to literacy growth. It is unfortunate that sometimes principals, assistant principals, and other members of administration become subject to this particular struggle for the same reasons as teachers. Denise clearly laid out a serious, but common struggle in the educational community, namely, the pressure to raise test scores at all times, even when the research is clear about how long it takes to make such gains and considers test scores as lagging indicators of successful implementation that occur only after the leading indicators.

**Relationship.** Denise did not see race as an issue in the way teachers responded to me or to the literacy requirements I endorsed. Rather, she thought that people may have responded with resistance because of the fact that I was a woman and the only female on the administrative staff. She thought it was unusual to have a female as a ‘boss’ and expected to have “drama” as a result of my presence based on the fact that I was a woman, which she associated with “drama”. She stated, “The female thing was more of a thing for me” (than race). She admitted that although the “drama” was a part of our school culture, her assumptions about me were wrong. In fact, because we developed a conversational rapport, she actually began to trust me and have faith that our

interactions would be productive. In the following conversation, she explained how our relationship improved her perception of me:

D: If I wanted to say something to you, I felt like we could like, talk it out.

And I could say like, ‘well what do you think?’ and I didn’t have to worry about like, how I would be perceived.... For me it changed when like, we would have conversations about other things. And I was like, “Okay. Like, you’re a real person.” You know?

K: Okay, okay. So, did the level of trust increase?

D: Yes.

Denise ended this thought with, “You kind of became more of like a person to me, you know?” This last statement serves as a snapshot of the kind of culture that maintains a divide between teachers and administration, an “Us vs. Them” mentality that works to sideline the focus from students onto building politics. It also highlights how important the idea of building relationships is to a healthy school culture and the responsibility of administration to initiate and maintain.

### **Veronica**

Veronica was one of the teachers in the study that seemed to grow the most professionally as she acknowledged in the interview. The most important, impactful, and interesting characteristic about Veronica was the very significant shift in beliefs and instructional practices she experienced as a result of her participation in the implementation process. As evidenced in her interview, she was heavily reliant on following the script and curricular items outlined in the Open Court program. As a result

of the transition process, she not only changed many of her instructional practices but also experienced some very significant shifts in beliefs about her students, how they learn, and her views of herself as a teacher.

**Major shift in beliefs and teaching behaviors.** Before teaching balanced literacy, Veronica believed that students, particularly kindergarten students, “needed the teacher all the time and you teach them”. Students were only able to learn if the teacher was with them all the time as sort of the “depositor” of knowledge (Freire, 1970). She wasn’t aware that students could acquire knowledge without her or that they could learn constructively by doing. She also stated that she “...didn’t know the potential my students could have, after. I didn’t know what they could do, what they were capable of doing once we started the balanced literacy.” She was only able to see her students’ potential when engaging them in ‘open-ended’ activities such as Writer’s Workshop, interactive writing, Reading Workshop, guided reading, etc. The nature of these types of activities placed no limits on student potential, thus allowing them to perform to the best of their ability. A stagnant instructional program that places limitations on student expectations and performance did not allow this awareness to come to fruition.

Veronica’s teaching abilities were drastically enhanced since, after learning about balanced literacy, she began to “teach”, “model”, “differentiate” and “reflect” on her teaching to make informed instructional decisions. She was very clear about not being able to reflect or even group kids while using Open Court because she “didn’t know any different” than to follow this program in the way in which it was designed, rather than make instructional decisions based on student data. She described herself as a “more knowledgeable teacher” who can “talk to you about centers... about guided reading” and

admitted that writing instruction was a bit of a challenge for kindergarten but, to her surprise, her students were writing by the end of their kindergarten year. Veronica mentioned resources or teaching materials more times than any other interviewee, and clearly needed “something to look at”, which indicated that the reference materials, templates, and scope and sequence or literacy foci were particularly helpful for her in place of a habitual reliance on the Open Court manual.

**Desired supports during the transition.** Looking back, Veronica felt she might have benefited from additional modeling of instructional techniques, fewer articles to read, and more information about differentiation during PD experiences. She acknowledged, “that differentiation is hard” but obviously knew enough about it to understand just how challenging it can be. Overall, she considered the implementation process as a positive one, particularly for the students because it “shows up in their test scores”. In addition, she noted that she was able reach a level of confidence and self-efficacy that would not have been realized without acquiring the knowledge and experiences of balanced literacy instruction.

**The effects of race.** Veronica suggested that negative teacher responses had nothing to do with my race, noting that teachers responded the way they did because “...it was just they [the teachers] were lazy” in reference to those teachers who did not follow my literacy directives. Although she did not recognize race as a factor in the school implementation process, she did note that it played a role in the literacy learning of our majority African American student population, as some students had African American parents who did not consistently support classroom literacy learning through homework assistance and completion. She stated that, “...race plays a role in carrying

forth at home their literacy, you know, their homework not done and they don't read with them and things like that." She also believed that her colleagues would agree with this statement.

### **Carla**

Carla communicated a clear theme related to the importance of, and need for differentiation during her interview. She expressed much concern in this statement about her lower-performing students and the observation that the Open Court curriculum did not adequately address the needs of her struggling students: "The biggest challenge, I think, was how do you reach the ones that are struggling." She also admitted that her knowledge of literacy instruction, particularly in the area of differentiation for children who struggle with reading, was lacking and that she felt ill-equipped to compensate for her observed shortcomings under the Open Court program. While she followed the program closely, she mentioned specific criticisms regarding its curriculum, such as a lack of phonics instruction for older readers, limited formative assessments and data, and an absence of activities and materials for struggling readers.

My thing was phonics. They didn't know how, some of them couldn't even read, break words down, and because they couldn't do that, doing all these routines, it was a waste of time for some.... You could do routines all day, but how do you know if the kids are really getting it? The low [workbook] didn't do much for them because they just [were] struggling anyway. [The] only time you really know is when you get test scores back.... for a student who could barely read is like, pushed from

kindergarten up to [upper grades], what is that I can do that every day with the student, every other day in the groups that I can make these students progressing forward.

**Open Court limitations.** Carla also thought that the Open Court curriculum lacked in the area of language arts, the very instruction she felt would prepare students to do well on one of our major benchmark assessments. We discussed why she felt comfortable deviating in this area but not with differentiation:

K: Why did you deviate with vocabulary?

Carla (C): Because I think the vocabulary that they were receiving didn't match focus with the test and all.

K: Okay.

C: Like, literary elements, or any devices that was not enough for them in order to be effective in taking the test.

K: Okay. So it looks like you made a choice, which some people don't necessarily do when teaching a scripted program. You made a choice to deviate outside of what the program was telling you to do. So let me ask you this, help me to understand why you didn't make deviations for the struggling ones because you ask how to reach the struggling ones. So why didn't you do something different (in this area)?

C: Two reasons. One reason is because I didn't have the training.

K: Okay.

C: I think to do that. I mean I can work with them one-on-one, but how effective could I be if I, you know, didn't really know what to do exactly



to help them progress and move forward. That was one reason, and the other reason is, it was just the time.

Carla mentioned “the time” in reference to the pacing guide outlined in the Open Court program that allows a specific amount of time for each teaching component. Carla was using a version of the program that did not allocate time for small group work. Also, the “deviations” Carla made were accomplished by adding vocabulary and literacy worksheets, with which she was accustomed to using given that Open Court used a series of worksheet pages (in workbooks) as a standard function of its program.

**The need for structure.** Although Carla had some issues with the Open Court program, she was less than excited about transitioning away from it to balanced literacy until she became familiar with some of the new instructional components. She spoke of having a need for the type of structure provided by Open Court:

You know what, to be honest with you, I was not a 100% fan because I was comfortable with my system that I thought worked, but when I started to find out more about (it) then I was like, yeah this would work, like the reading, the novels and interacting and engaging and having groups, like this would work. The only challenge that I saw with that was the behaviors. There was always an issue with that because you always have a group of kids that’s going to – just make it hard for you.

The teacher-directed, whole group instructional format characterized by Open Court puts more responsibility on the teacher to basically “control” students’ behavior, making the management of “the behaviors” of which Carla spoke, easier than balanced literacy work, where students sometimes practice without direct teacher intervention. Carla admitted

that her colleagues did not initially support the transition either: “Everybody, for the most part, I think, was kind of against (it) until they kind of, got into it.”

**Reflections on the implementation process.** Teachers “got into it” or became more familiar with balanced literacy through a gradual introduction of topics in professional development experiences, and through in-class application of those topics where I modeled and/or observed, then provided feedback. Carla felt this gradual transition was too fast and hindered her implementation process. She felt the transition moved at a pace that did not allow her time “...to really learn it before something else was thrown at you”. She felt that the transition would have been easier if she could have had more one-on-one support in the classroom or, more specifically, if I came in to model instructional techniques. She mentioned this when speaking about her perceptions of as the Literacy Coordinator, and noted this throughout the interview as an issue that restricted or obstructed her progress in the implementation process.

I think it is important to mention that my role as an administrator basically required that I use a variety of techniques to move the implementation process forward. To this end, my work often included one-on-one coaching and assistance with teachers, as well as modeling in classrooms. As evidenced by Carla’s statements below, however, the need for my hands-on support was sometimes greater than my availability:

...every time you did come by, and you helped me. I appreciate especially when you helped me organized my centers and structuring it and that helped me out a whole lot. So when I needed help, [you] did that.... I saw your role, it was effective, it benefited us. The part that I thought that

could have been done more, it was more like one-on-one in the classrooms with the teachers, modeling, like teaching a lesson.

Carla went on to describe what this high level support could look like based on her experience using a reading program at another school:

They would sit with this consultant and she would go over the program with them. She would drill them in a program, she could teach them what they need to know and doing that, it built up my confidence in teaching a program, and I became more skilled at teaching a program and everything. ... So something like that because like, with what you all do with Balanced Literacy. With the students, you get the students in small groups where you could work with them one-on-one. So that you can help them improve and get better. ... Teachers need that too.

Again, Carla's focus was on structures that support differentiation and those that may struggle with the content; except that this time, she felt it was the teachers who needed the extra support. Carla also described how what I did in my role as Literacy Coordinator fell short of addressing teachers who may have needed to work more closely with a "resource," which according to Carla, may have contributed to how individuals perceived my role, resulting in potentially negative effects on the implementation process.

...to be honest with you, a lot of things that you [were] teaching and showing us was good stuff. I mean it was... that was not the problem. The challenge was being available. ... So when we needed you, when we ran into problems when we were trying to implement what we were being

taught, what you were teaching... So it was like, when I needed for the resource to come in and, you know, walk me through this... That was the part that kind of took away from the perception of you as a leader, which was important.

We had instructional coaches on staff whose main purpose, on paper, was to provide that one-on-one support for teachers in classrooms. However, as commonly occurs in schools, instructional coaches were oftentimes saddled with other responsibilities that included administrative duties passed down to them to complete. When this happens, a system that is designed to provide teachers with the support they need to learn and apply new practices that ultimately determine the success or failure of a new initiative becomes compromised. In this case, Carla felt positively about balanced literacy, and could have implemented it more effectively but for the necessary help she felt was not available to her.

**Barriers to implementation.** In addition to a perceived lack of support, Carla mentioned competing priorities as an obstacle toward implementation efforts. The priorities she mentioned, however, mostly include typical teacher responsibilities such as lesson planning, inputting grades, and calling parents, potentially providing insight into just how mentally demanding it may be, as a teacher, to learn and implement new practices into instruction while continuing to maintain the basic duties of the teaching profession. Carla's impression of professional development also emphasized, not surprisingly, differentiation. She felt that some teachers, including herself, had mastered certain topics covered in certain professional development sessions and thus, should not have been expected to meet for professional development at those times. Carla stated that

professional development was repetitive in some cases, which may have also hindered implementation efforts:

C: I felt like some things were (a) repetition that we had done before. We [had] done already or something that, you know, I got; I understand this already. I got this part.

K: You felt like some of the PDs weren't as effective because they were repetitive.

C: (Professional development should be) what is it that we need to work on most, more than anything so that these teachers can be more confident, become more skilled at teaching these kids the different things and that's not what it is, it my opinion.

My system for gathering data during my observations included checklists and, in some cases, a tier system to determine which teachers were performing at a level of proficiency that indicates whether a topic needed to be covered during professional development by grade level, or individually. The example below from my literacy journal provides insight into my attempts at collecting teacher data in an organized manner that lead to an informative data gathering and analysis process:

*We have transitioned into Phase 2 pretty smoothly, I believe. I completed a final assessment of my teachers and determined that only 3 out of 23 teachers responsible for teaching writing were in my Tier 3 or in the 'red'. I developed a tier system for Writers Workshop implementation, complete with descriptors for each Tier. There is some level of anxiety around keeping up with a certain level of effectiveness around Writers' Workshop*

*instruction. So, to address that, I have a final checklist with Tier 1 descriptors ('green') for fast observational data. Also, teachers indicated on their follow-up knowledge surveys that they knew more about, and implemented Writers Workshop components more frequently than in August. (Duh!)*

My data collection process was particularly helpful in providing information to support my work as a Literacy Coordinator. Using this system revealed that teachers often had an inflated view of their capabilities in certain aspects of balanced literacy implementation throughout the three years of implementation.

**Professional development differentiation.** Professional development was differentiated after the first year, although the teachers' view of differentiation was limited. Their idea of differentiation was restricted to the option of opting out of professional development if they felt they were carrying out the practices or tasks covered in professional development. Differentiation, as it was actually implemented in PD sessions included a choice of teacher center activities focusing on various aspects of balanced literacy such as: a) a choice of professional articles on various balanced literacy topics to read and present to the group, b) creating center activities at different levels on the same task based on individual teacher data, analyzing data for individual classrooms or grade levels, etc. Despite this fact, some teachers persisted in their demands for differentiation in PD:

- PD's [should be] differentiated. We spend so much time/effort differentiating instruction in our classroom, yet we sit through the same PD week after week that doesn't help us at all.

- We are always doing literacy. It would be nice to expand on other areas of our teaching. We also spend a lot of time relearning the same things. I believe that we should run some PDs with differentiation in mind. Just like we do it for the kids. I feel that PDs are there for the teachers that are behind. If you do what you are asked to do and complete it in a timely manner, then you end of (sic) sitting in PD with nothing to do.

**Race vs. relationship.** Carla stated that she did not consider race as a factor in the implementation process, although she really didn't seem committed to this point of view. She did admit that there was a difference between how teachers responded to me, as opposed to how they responded to the White assistant principals. In the conversation below, she attributed this differential treatment to the fact that they had been at the school longer than I had:

They [assistant principals] have been around a while. So they had a relationship and they [teachers] have a rapport with them. You coming in new and you wanna change this stuff and you want to do all this and that...Who are you? Who do you think you are? So I don't think it necessarily anything to do with race more than to do with timing and have a relationship with (a) person and I am sure that probably played a role for some people.

Again, the references to relationship, or the absence thereof, as crucial in making the implementation process more or less acceptable to teachers and in positively or negatively affecting implementation efforts. Carla commented directly about our relationship between: "...our relationship, you and I, you and I thought it was okay" as if

making the case for how relationship can impact teacher responses. She and I always had a positive working rapport, as well as a good working relationship. Her message seemed to be that because I did not have a relationship with some teachers, they ‘pushed back,’ or resisted my directives.

When speaking directly about race, however, did not take a position on this, as she stated the topic to be a “taboo” subject, not having heard any racial references about me herself:

K: Okay, alright. So just to recap the race question, so do you not think, or you do think that race may have played a role, how the implementation process or how people perceived me as a leader.

C: I don’t know. It could have been but for me, no.

K: What about other people?

C: Other people? Could have been because...it could have been, but you know people are not ‘gonna, you know...They’re just not. If they have a problem with you teaching them what they, about literacy, they are not going to come out and say something about it. You know you will see something, but then they would never say anything to anybody about it. I mean, that’s taboo.... because no one would ever say to me, “She’s Black. She think she running things. So something like that would never happen.

**Ingrid**



Ingrid states that began the transition with feelings and reactions that were similar to those expressed by other study participants, such as:

- I hated it. And like, “This is terrible. My kids are never going to learn.”
- “Excuse me. There’s no way this is going to work.”
- I felt really overwhelmed
- I was nervous

She shared characteristics with other candidates who evidenced a strong, negative reaction to moving away from a scripted reading program. The first characteristic is a lack of knowledge about balanced literacy instruction, or actually a limited knowledge about literacy instruction in general. Ingrid was a relatively new teacher at the beginning of the implementation and had only been exposed to a basal approach to literacy instruction. She also had very limited knowledge of planning for, and teaching reading and writing, and felt comfort with the provision of a ‘script’ to follow, together with a set of instructions that would ensure that she would not “fail” her students. She stated, “And it was just all, basically, laid out right there for you in the book;” although, “...there really wasn’t much thought process” about reading instruction or even student learning.

**Dependence on Open Court.** While having great concern about student learning and test scores, Ingrid confessed that, “...at that time, I didn’t really know anything else,” so she followed the program without regard for whether it was working for the students or not. She felt pressure to follow the Open Court very closely because she thought to do so was the only way to help her students meet their assessment goals, and stated: “I feel like at the time, if I wasn’t looking directly at the teacher’s manual, I felt like I was being devious, and not doing what I should’ve been doing. At that time, I didn’t really, know

anything else.” I believe this lack of literacy instructional knowledge creates a dependency that contributes to very uncomfortable feelings and negative reactions when a transition is not to another program which potentially promotes the same dependency status as the first, but rather to a *method* of teaching that requires one to use their own knowledge of reading instructional practices, planning, and assessment.

**Classroom management.** A second characteristic that goes hand-in-hand with a movement away from a highly structured program is the concern about classroom management. Ingrid was another teacher who worked hard to resolve past management issues in her classroom. She realized how a highly structured program like Open Court helped to control her students by allowing her to have the control in the class. Her concerns, “The fear of, once again, failing, being a failure for my students” reveal her expectations for the students’ academic and behavioral growth, both of which had the potential to make her look bad to administration and the rest of the staff. Ingrid expressed her anxiety about the effects of one particular balanced literacy practice on her students’ behavior: “I was afraid to give the students that freedom, to go ahead and be in a group doing something, while I’m pulling a group to the back table. I was really nervous.” Considering the high stakes associated with failure in this area, it makes sense that Ingrid would have some anxiety regarding moving away from practices in a program that had helped her maintain a sense of control in her classroom management.

**Balanced literacy.** Ingrid’s push against balanced literacy stopped when the questions about balanced literacy began. As she became more familiar with how balanced literacy works in the classroom, she asked herself questions such as:

Well, how do I know what I'm going to do as far as guided reading goes?  
How do I know what books I'm going to use? How do I know what books  
to pull for them? What level they're going to be? Like, I think just  
understanding it, bits and pieces at a time.... When I sit back and think on  
it, that now, were they really being pushed (during the use of Open Court)?  
Were they really being challenged? [But then] How would this work? How  
are you going to be able to meet the needs of all kids by doing different  
things? .... How did I know if I was assessing them correctly? How did I  
know? And then, the domino effect of that: How will that hurt them?....  
[Regarding] guided reading: What were the conversations? How did the  
reading go?

As evidenced here, when Ingrid's learning about balanced literacy increased, together  
with the generation of an increased amount of questions, she found that certain aspects of  
the implementation process served to resolve some of these questions. This in turn helped  
her become more comfortable and confident with incorporating these practices in her  
instruction, and supported the implementation process for the school as a whole. A few  
implementation components she found personally helpful included the following:

- The videos were very helpful (during professional development).
- ...going to other [balanced literacy] schools (to observe their balanced literacy structures, lesson plan templates, grading procedures, etc.)
- Just doing practice too. Over the years, it's like, each and every year it got better and better.

Ingrid even reflected on how her improvements in classroom management contributed to a successful implementation: “Things continued to get better for me because that classroom management aspect is becoming stronger”.

According to Ingrid, “everything came with time,” which highlights the importance of simply having the time necessary to practice skills with access to coaching, modeling, feedback, and the appropriate resources. Also important is a supportive environment that includes material resources, as well as physical or personnel resources about which Ingrid commented: “Because if ever needed anything, I would go to you. And you would always provide me with resources or feedback.” I do remember the way Ingrid sought out my input and assistance on a few occasions, and that she consequently made adjustments in planning and instruction. Ingrid was one of the teachers who often initiated her own professional growth.

**Instructional materials.** Several times during her interview, Ingrid mentioned balanced literacy instructional materials made available to her and commented on how useful they were for planning comprehension instruction and writing lessons, among other things. Having these resources thoroughly improved the implementation process, according to Ingrid. I would agree that materials are principally important, especially in a balanced literacy program that promotes differentiation and where students are sometimes in need of a wide variety of materials at different reading levels. However, Ingrid expressed a comfort in having something to read from, much like the Open Court teaching manual, in her statements such as: “Lucy Calkins was very easy to understand because it was super-scripted and broken down according to units”. This reference to “scripted,” seemed to indicate a residual effect from Open Court, in that having

something to read from was a source of comfort. She also mentioned *The Comprehension Toolkit* by Harvey and Goudvis (2005) as a book that was particularly useful to her. This resource also features verbiage resembling a script and clearly detailed lesson components. Ultimately, Ingrid asserts that, "...we literally had all the resources we needed," as a positive aspect of the implementation process.

**Resistance to implementation.** Ingrid recalled teacher resistance as the main issue that worked to thwart implementation efforts. She mentioned those "reluctant individuals" who sat in professional development but were "not listening to anything, really and [not] taking it in". She described these "stubborn people" as doing the following: "They're going to go back, shut their door, and do what they want to do" in reference to those who were present to hear the clear messages communicated by the principal during professional development and via email messages, but who would ignore directives from me. Granted, my messages were also accompanied by contradictory missives from the principal, but Ingrid referred to these teachers as "reluctant learners," saying, "it just depended upon the individual" as to who would "choose to not do what they should be doing in their own rooms". Ingrid ultimately placed the responsibility on administration to "hold everybody accountable, individually," which did not occur.

**Race and relationships.** Ingrid seemed genuinely appalled with the interview question related to race, and that my status as an African American would have any bearing on teachers' responses to, and perception of the implementation process. She stated emphatically, "that would be really stupid," and that my race should not have been a consideration since "... [I] clearly knew things ... gave [them] tons of resources, and showed [them] research. She considered my role as an administrator to be "under" that of

the other three administrators or “wedged right up underneath them.” She inferred that there were differences in the way teachers responded to me as opposed to the principal or assistant principals, but attributed those differences to “relationships” and “who people feel close to,” although the assistant principal was well-known for favoring certain students while ignoring others, calling women derogatory names, and using his cell phone to record teacher behavior that would be used to report unacceptable behavior to the principal. About this particular assistant principal, one teacher remarked in the yearly survey:

Assistance(sic) principal is good at the data and paperwork, but he lacks personal skills. He can be rude, sometimes blows off teachers and consistently makes comments about how lazy the teachers are, and how they do not work hard enough. He does little to nothing to support the teachers.

Another teacher conveyed similar concerns about the same assistant principal:

I feel that the only time I see my assistant director is when he is trying to "catch me" doing something wrong. I have a hard time trusting him because my communication with him is very limited.

I include these instances only to provide examples of the conduct displayed by the White assistant principal with whom teachers were able to build relationships, according to Ingrid, and respectfully followed his directives.

I was somewhat aware of how relationships played a part in school dynamics and, although I admit not actively working on building relationships, I attempted to create situations that would help to create connections between the teachers and myself. For

example, I volunteered to read aloud to their students at certain points of the year. I reflected on doing so in the excerpt from my literacy journal below:

*The biggest ‘a-ha’ this week was seeing how my read alouds in classrooms (did many this week and last week) gave me some knowledge of that particular classroom and the students and teacher, but also served as an intro or a bridge, so that kids know me when I’m working with them during model lessons and conferring. Perfect segue way into working in these classrooms.*

This may not have given me the same results as having a relationship with the teachers, but the activity was successful even if only in a limited capacity.

**Positive outlook on implementation.** Ultimately, Ingrid concluded that balanced literacy implementation was a very positive undertaking that benefited her professionally and the students academically, particularly in the area of differentiation. About this she asserted:

- I think once it was, really started, balanced literacy, it started becoming a lot more evident. The needs of students individually. Especially our lower students.
- Even just your informal observations. You could see, your lower students, their fluency is improving. Their comprehension is improving. So, at that point and time, I understood that this is something that needs to happen on a regular basis. To help them all out.
- It’s helped us to identify kids that need extra support, who need more than just balanced literacy in a classroom, they need extra support service.
- I think it’s really helped us to push our higher kids.

- Overall it's really helped us to target the individual needs of all the kids.

Ingrid highlighted an important goal of most implementation efforts, which is not only to change individual teacher practice, but to impact school culture in a way that encourages teachers to systematize certain practices and expectations because they recognize their value as a result of the implementation. It appeared that differentiation could potentially become one of those expected practices based on the fact that teachers see the need AND have the tools to address the need.

### **Cecily**

Cecily's interview involved contradictory statements about the implementation process that left me a bit confused, and I worked hard to try to figure out what she really wanted to say. Like many of the other teachers, Cecily stated she knew "nothing" about balanced literacy before the transition. In fact, she could not recall even having heard the term before I came to the school even though she had been teaching for a few years.

**Open Court.** Cecily said she "kind of liked" Open Court when she was using the program and seemed to still have positive feelings towards the type of instruction outlined in the teaching manual with its heavy use of whole group instruction. She also claimed that Open Court "had all the components", "hit all the skills," and seemed to consider it to be a comprehensive reading program as indicated in our conversation here:

Open Court. I mean, it gave us a sense of, it hit every... skills that we was doing. Plus the fact it, it include the Phonics, the writing piece, and everything that's in Open Court. So we actually didn't have to come up



with things, it was already there for us. We just need to make sure we teach it, and teach it, with fidelity.

Cecily went on to describe the lessons in Open Court below. I pushed for a comparison between the Open Court lessons and minilessons, and she maintained that one was just as effective as the other:

C: We did, like a read-aloud with Open Court where we did read the story.

K: And asked questions?

C: Ask questions that deal with, whatever the skills was.

K: So do you feel like that was as successful as a mini-lesson?

C: I think so. With balanced literacy, we do a mini-lesson every day. I

believe in direct instruction. Like you see [in] a whole group.

Here Cecily considered the comprehension instruction featured in Open Court, that is reading a story aloud and then asking the whole class questions about that story as effective as the mini-lesson that includes direct instruction, modeling, guided practice, and independent practice.

**Different practices, same beliefs.** Cecily may have altered practices, but did not shift her beliefs, or it could be that she considered the two practices as one and the same, as teachers often do until they are able to see the differences between the activities. For this reason, the gradual release of responsibility was an area that we spent a considerable amount of time on in several different contexts (e.g., phonics, comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, the content areas), which may account for the teacher complaints about “doing the same thing over and over.” I determined that we had to get this aspect of instruction right, particularly the modeling and guided practice components, because our

teachers were moving from direct instruction to independent practice and some students were not learning. It appears, though, that Cecily had not yet made the distinction between the two and/or had not placed a value on the modeling and guided practice portions of lesson delivery, since she viewed one way of teaching to be just as effective as the other according.

At another point in the interview, however, Cecily disclosed that Open Court was not necessarily the “right” thing to do as a method of reading instruction. She discussed her feelings, noting that:

C: That was what I was asked to do (teach Open Court).

K: In Open Court? Okay.

C: Okay.

K: So internally, did you think that this was the right thing to do?

C: No.

K: Oh, okay.

C: No, I didn't.

K: Okay. Okay. But you were just doing it because, this is what, ...

C: I didn't think it was, the right thing.

This appears to be a contradiction to her earlier statement asserting that Open Court was as effective as the balanced lesson mini-lesson.

**Initial reactions to implementation.** Overall, Cecily was not excited when initially learning about the transition, but she did not consider the event negatively either. Her feelings, like some other teachers, hovered closest to fear, particularly fear of the unknown as she explains:

C: It was kind of mixed, Ms. Chase. It was kind of mixed (her reaction to balanced literacy implementation).

K: Okay, okay.

C: I mean, I'm up to change, if change is, can help. I'm willing to, adapt. I can adapt to changes. So, it was just kind of, unexpected. Mixed feelings.

K: Okay. So mixed in terms of it was positive because it was a change, and you don't mind change.

C: Right.

K: But negative how?

C: I didn't know what we were getting into.

I did not identify changes in Cecily's beliefs about how literacy should be taught or how students should learn literacy skills, but the interview did uncover some differences in her practices in Open Court instruction from those during balanced literacy implementation. The new practices included developmental spelling instruction via Words Their Way and Writer's Workshop, which also encompass the kind of teaching that Cecily referred to in a positive manner. I was not able to uncover the reasons why these practices were favorable to her other than the fact that she felt confident performing them. She also included guided reading on this list even though she was not able to provide a rationale for her approval of this practice either:

C: Balanced literacy was small group. So, ...

K: Okay.

C: That, which I really like.

K: Okay.

C: The small group.

K: Okay.

C: So you do have kids that learn on different level, level. And they need that small group attention as well, I believe.

K: Okay.

C: So that's the bigger change that, I really enjoy from doing balanced literacy.

K: Okay. So, but that wasn't a, that wasn't a change in beliefs. Like, that, you already believed that—

C: Right.

Cecily conducted her guided reading sessions in a way that deviated from the best practices approach that teachers were expected to implement during guided reading. Instead of having her students reading the entire text to themselves in low, quiet voices as the teacher took turns listening in on individual students, Cecily persisted in using the Round Robin reading technique during Guided Reading because she said the other way “didn’t work”. When pressed to explain what “didn’t work” meant, she was not able to articulate a rationale for her thinking. I found it interesting that she was comfortable changing this aspect of instruction but did not seem at ease changing aspects of Open Court of which she did not approve. When pressed to provide a reason for choosing to change the balanced literacy expectations and not those of Open Court, she claimed it was because she was new to the school and, therefore, didn’t feel confident enough to make those changes. She also stated that, with Open Court, she didn’t know any different and it was “...just what I was used to”. While I could be frustrated about her choosing to

do what she wanted (although research is very clear about the ineffectiveness of Round Robin), at least preparation in balanced literacy provides teachers with the confidence to make their own instructional decisions rather than blindly follow instructional directives.

**Professional development.** Cecily's descriptions of professional development included some positive recollections. She felt that the training for balanced literacy was helpful, particularly for people who had never taught it before--the overwhelming majority of the teaching staff. A specific professional development activity Cecily remembered was the opportunity to read and review relevant articles and professional literature, as well as view video examples of applicable practices. Her comment about these activities was:

The articles, articles were real good. So we read some of the articles, and then we, watched the video.... some of the video was really good. So we could actually see how the program was actually being implemented. So the video was really good...(the article) it's something like, you can go back and read over. "Okay, because I'm doing this right."...So, you can use it as a reference.

My goal was to incorporate written resources in almost every full professional development session so that teachers could refer to these later for my purposes or even later on in their teaching career. I wanted to prepare teachers not only to know what to do, but to have a rationale for why they made the decisions they made in their classroom instruction.

**Implementation barriers.** Cecily had some very specific thoughts regarding barriers to the implementation process and provided recommendations for improvements.

I think an interesting note, however, is that some of the obstacles she listed contradict with items she said promoted implementation in some cases. For example, Cecily included professional development (which was actually in the middle of the day due to early dismissal on Wednesdays) among the elements she viewed as a hindrance, although she admits that it was a necessity for the success of the implementation. Cecily stated: “You’re tired, you’re teaching all day, then you get out of that. Then you go sit in a chair, you know.... But you have to go and sit there for another hour and a half, about two hours” as participants in professional development. Cecily also maintained that videos were a “good” and helpful aspect of the process, even though she also complained that they were unrealistic “...with the classroom, with a teacher, with an aid in her room, with fifteen kids. And we got, what, double that? With no aid.” In addition, Cecily recalled that there were topics covered during professional development that were not directly related to classroom instruction and/or expectations in this statement: “Maybe when we sit through a PD, and, it’s not something that we’re like, teaching, or it’s not what we, are doing, actually doing in the classroom.”

**Improvements to implementation.** Cecily had some very specific suggestions for ways that the implementation process could have been enhanced. Some of what she mentioned was similar to the comments made by other teachers, such as more small group work among teachers, as well as school visits to see exemplar balanced literacy implementation practices. Cecily also suggested the following, both of which are requests for classroom support and/or assistance:

- “...actually have someone in your classroom to make sure that you are implementing the program to the full extent.”

- “...maybe a little more hands on” (which would include me demonstrating lessons and modeling for teachers in classrooms).

Another interesting suggestion Cecily had was for less responsibility/paperwork, claiming that balanced literacy asks teachers to be responsible for creating lesson plans since they are determining the instruction for their own students. This concern is a valid one in that balanced literacy instruction necessitates increased responsibility, as teachers must establish student learning goals, lesson objectives, and the method of instruction in the absence of a pre-determined program that explicitly indicates what should be taught and how. Open Court removes this responsibility from the teacher, only requiring that teachers follow the program with ‘fidelity’.

**Reflections on leadership.** Among all of the interviewees, Cecily had the most to offer in the area of race and my role as an administrator. First, she admitted to initially being unaccepting of my leadership role thinking I was just going to add to the “drama” in the school. Over time, however, she began to realize that I was not interested in “drama” but was principally focused on promoting literacy instruction and student achievement by preparing teachers in the area of balanced literacy. Cecily admitted the following realizations about me: “I feel you was (sic) there to help me advance” and “...but then as I got to know you, I’m like, “Okay, Ms. Chase is here for the kids.” Cecily also found herself in a position to defend my work to other teachers in order to reinforce the realizations she had accepted about me: “I said (to other teachers), ‘You gotta get to know Ms. Chase is here [and] she was here for the kids.’-- That became clear maybe, after the first year. After the first year you was (sic) there.”

Cecily admitted that she did not initially view my role as a true leader with power and the ability to make decisions, but rather as someone who was “told what to do from them [male administrators]”. When pressed to give examples to support this response, she failed to do so. Even without support, however, this perspective was shared among the teaching staff. Over time, this belief changed for her as I increased the accountability and remained consistent with my expectations. Cecily discussed her thinking about this below:

K: Did you see it being equal?

C: No, I didn't...I figured that you [were] told what to do from them, and so, I didn't see [it] as being equal...I think that's why, other people didn't respect you as being equal to them. Even though you [were] an administrator, they didn't feel, you [were] equal to them. So, ... (they would say things like) “You know, Ms. Chase doesn't have no control.”... But we didn't feel that you had any power...Then that kind of shifted as time went on, like, “Okay. Ms. Chase is up there, we have to do what Ms. Chase say.” You [were] making sure that we did what we [were] supposed to do. And you know, stick to it. So you were being real persistent about it.

**Race and school environment.** As the conversation turned specifically to race, Cecily reflected on the school environment at the time and teacher reactions to my leadership. She stated that she definitely believed that race had an impact on the implementation and that some teachers questioned and, in some cases, dismissed my



directives because of a general attitude of disrespect toward me because I was African American. Specifically, this is what Cecily had to say to the question about race:

I feel that, during this transition, I felt that because, ... Because you were Black, and, they were White, and they didn't respect you, or think you knew what you was talking about in, in terms of, ... I think with some people it was race... I mean, you coming in, telling them what to do, and how to do it. And you changing this. And they were so used to doing [it] another way. Like "Who is this lady? Who is she coming in telling us what to do?"

Cecily went on to make a remark about racial influences on classroom management. She observed that White teachers at our school had more management challenges with African American children, and suggested that this observation may influence our (mostly White) teachers' to be reluctant towards embracing the balanced literacy curriculum. If this were the case, the resistance I experienced could have stemmed from the feelings that the teachers might have had towards moving away from the structure of Open Court and, thereby, exposing or highlighting any issues they may have with classroom management.

C: I think that the White teachers struggle more than African American teachers (and) with the Black kids. They have to have the kids so they have, full control. And yeah. And, I think they probably think that, balanced literacy's probably the worst thing that you can do with African American kids.

K: Because it allows them to move and talk?

C: And express themselves, and talk, and express themselves.

Cecily did not have access to other teacher's interview responses, although in some ways her sentiments spoke to some of the concerns other teachers expressed about their challenges with classroom management.

### **Conclusions**

We often hear the phrase "Change is hard," and the participating teachers interviewed for this study give us insight into what, exactly, that phrase can mean. The thought of moving away from Open Court brought up descriptions such as "nervous", "afraid", "overwhelmed", and "terrible," and not because teachers were overly excited about the scripted program they were using, but because it was, for most, all they knew. The majority of the participants did not have experience with, or knowledge of balanced literacy, nor did they have confidence in their ability to teach literacy to children. However, as a result of an organized, systematic, sustained professional development series, all collaborating participants experienced a change in literacy instructional practice, most also evidenced a change in beliefs, and some acquired confidence and a sense of efficacy regarding their literacy instruction absent at the beginning of the transition. Some teachers became aware of the need to differentiate instruction for their struggling students, while others were already aware of the need, but lacked an instructional repertoire to adequately address these needs. Not everyone recognized race as a factor in the process, although there seemed to be a pervasive pattern of mistrust and dysfunction in the school culture. All participants viewed the transition as a positive occurrence and, although they could identify aspects of the implementation process that

could have been improved, they consider themselves better teachers as a result. I will explore the implications of these data in the next chapter. Chapter five will also address study limitations, discusses conclusions drawn from the data, and makes relevant recommendations based on those conclusions.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

In Chapter One, I discussed the importance of effective literacy instruction for African American children and attempted to make a case for recognizing the urgency for making effective methods of instruction available to African American student populations. Placing well-trained, experienced teachers in schools serving African American children is one way to achieve this. In this chapter, I will revisit the idea, as outlined in Chapter One, that African American students should have and can have access to teachers who are equipped to teach literacy with effectiveness regardless of what preparation they received (or did not receive) in teacher education courses. Through teacher reports and classroom observational data, I will provide evidence that teachers, namely the teachers who agreed to participate in interviews for this study, recognized and identified changes in their beliefs and teaching behaviors, increased literacy knowledge, enhanced their capacity to teach reading to African American children, and acknowledged an improved self-confidence resulting from the actions and decisions of the Literacy Coordinator in preparation for a transition from using Open Court to balanced literacy instruction.

The initial chapter of this dissertation also referenced the concept of change and the manner in which teachers may engage in a change process that leads to successful implementation efforts. In the current chapter, I will review teachers' experiences with, and responses to, structures that achieve the goal of changing their instructional practice, changing their beliefs, both of which contributes to a school culture that sustains a shift

away from Open Court to balanced literacy implementation. Finally, I will explore perceptions regarding the impact that race had on the implementation process and the manner in which that impact may have affected the implementation process. I organize this chapter by re-stating each of my research questions, discussing the ways that the interpreted study data provided answers to those questions. Also included in question responses are analyses of the data from the themes that emerged out of interview responses. I then discuss the implications and limitations of this investigation, together with recommendations for future research.

## **Discussion**

### **Question #1**

*What happened during the implementation of balanced literacy and how did teachers perceive the implementation/change process?*

In the process of transitioning the school from Open Court to balanced literacy instruction, it was expected that teacher behaviors would change. For substantial change to occur, however, the long-range goal of moving to balanced literacy instruction included changing the instructional culture of the school so that systems, practices, and beliefs about balanced literacy instruction would endure even after the active implementation activities ceased. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Marzano, Waters, & McNulty (2005) describe this as second-order change, which involves a profound shift in beliefs and subsequent actions by teachers, as well as staff who support literacy instruction including the administration.

Fullan (2001) describes three components necessary for the implementation of any new program as it relates to second-order change, namely, a) new teaching materials,

b) the use of new teaching approaches, and c) an alteration or adaptation of new beliefs. Change must occur in practice consistently along these three dimensions in order for the changes to have an impact on the outcome. These three components of second-order change, as outlined in the study data, were in place as we worked toward implementing a new program to replace Open Court with balanced literacy. The incorporation of new teaching materials included painfully abandoning Open Court teacher editions in favor of formative assessment materials (Benchmark Assessment System and Words Their Way), novels for literature-centered instruction, Writing Workshop Units of Study, and professional readings, and a variety of resources from Fountas and Pinnell in order to inform teachers of the theories (or the reasons / rationale ) regarding balanced literacy instruction, and the appropriate instruction to plan for and implement as a proper response to the data that emerged from assessment results.

The use of different teaching strategies was influenced by the use of new teaching materials. The driving force pushing new teaching strategies, however, was the professional development sessions designed to help teachers understand how to apply these new materials to their new understandings about balanced literacy. Professional development sessions also included the ‘hows’ of teaching balanced literacy which consisted of modeling teaching strategies with an emphasis on key components of the gradual release of responsibility (GRR) such as modeling and guided practice. My observations led me to believe that teachers were leaving out these transformative components of GRR, going from direct instruction (telling what the strategy is) straight to independent practice with no opportunities to show students how to perform the strategy, allow them to practice it with guidance, or opportunities to provide corrective student

feedback as they practice, and before completely “letting go” and allowing students to basically teach themselves during independent practice.

As evidenced by observation data and teacher reports, instructional practice and teacher beliefs pertaining to literacy instruction, teachers moved away from a heavy dependence on the teacher’s manual towards a reliance on their own theoretical knowledge of balanced literacy, and the ability to plan for and implement whole group and small group balanced literacy instruction in their classrooms. Teachers who previously did not give much consideration to their students’ needs became the experts of their own instructional domain when it came to planning instruction that met their students’ needs. A matter of consideration, however, revolves around whether these changes in behaviors resulted in a substantial, second-order change given that some teaching behaviors reverted back to “drill and kill” test preparation activities when high-stake tests were looming and with reminders from the principal to “close their doors and do what you need to do.” Although teachers successfully maintained balanced literacy practices at other times of the year, second-order change suggests that a return to previous teaching practices, in this case ‘kill and drill test prep’, can be interpreted as an indication that a deep, substantial change in beliefs and practices has not occurred.

When applying the definition of second-order change by Marzano, et al. (2005), all the criteria had not been met because although teachers showed evidence that their beliefs and behaviors changed significantly other staff, specifically the principal, displayed evidence that his previously-held beliefs in using low level test-preparation activities as a means of achieving higher test scores were still considered an acceptable practice and his beliefs had not been altered by the work we engaged in as a school.

Looking back, the principal attended very few professional development sessions so he did not have full access to the most important feature in the implementation process.

Consequently, a condition of true second-order change should be the requirement that all staff participate as learners in on-site or off-site professional development trainings with a focus on the manner in which the staff member, based on their function in the school, must support the implementation process.

### **Question #1a**

*What actions, decisions, and activities did the Literacy Coordinator implement to equip teachers with the tools necessary to change their instructional practices to teach balanced literacy without the use of a scripted basal program?*

“We basically were just told okay follow this, follow the curriculum ...back then we didn’t have people like you.”

**The duties of the literacy coordinator.** As I stated in Chapter 1, the Literacy Coordinator has the opportunity to make a greater impact on the school community and literacy culture of the school than any of other roles listed under the reading professionals as outlined by the IRA (2010). My thoughts as I operated in all of these roles were always global and systemically focused. Even completing activities that may have appeared minute and mundane such as ordering lunch for a professional development day or applying for free books was completed with a focus on the literacy program as a whole and on moving the implementation process forward. Therein lies, I believe, the primary characteristic that distinguishes the Literacy Coordinator role from the other roles of the reading professional. The Literacy Coordinator who is operating as an administrator in that role (meaning the person making all decisions about the literacy program) does so



with the understanding that all decisions, actions, activities, and pursuits must contribute to the overall goal for the literacy program. As a result, *everything* either contributes to or takes away from the literacy program. Every decision I made either supported the implementation process or hindered it.

In the absence of a Literacy Coordinator, the principal would be responsible for these duties. However, as stated in Chapter One, the vast majority of principals do not have the educational background or training to lead a school in this type of literacy reform (Reeves, 2008). The typical principal only spends 11 percent of their time on instructional issues while directing 62 percent or more of their attention on managerial issues (Stronge, 1998; Stronge & Catano, 2007). Thus, even a principal who may have the appropriate literacy knowledge and academic preparation to closely oversee literacy initiatives must devote the bulk of their focus to issues unrelated to literacy. According to Elmore, (2000), principals typically spend the least amount of their time on instructional matters. The distribution of responsibilities by which principals must abide would prevent even a well-prepared principal from the ability to focus on issues of literacy reform in an effective manner. As previously noted, a Literacy Coordinator can dutifully and effectively perform in the role of an administrator with the literacy expertise and experience needed to support literacy reform. This is most effective when that individual stands side-by-side with a principal who fully supports their work as a Literacy Coordinator (IRA, 2010).

***Establish vision.*** As mentioned in Chapter 1, Meister (2000) suggests that a focus on building a vision should be included in the five essential areas of importance when considering implementing change in a way that has lasting effects in a school building.

During the introductory PDs at the beginning of the implementation, I attempted to establish a shared vision regarding what we as a school could all agree on, and what would indicate its successful implementation. At the time, the teachers appeared to accept and support this vision of a school that supported a balanced literacy philosophy and instructional ethos. The feedback from this PD was incredibly positive, with some insightful questions and encouraging statements. One teacher requested to revisit our shared vision later in the implementation process. I regret, however, not following through with this idea and returning to re-establish this vision in a meaningful way more than twice during the entire implementation period. If we are to accept Meister's thoughts about the impact of vision on change efforts, then surely this lack of an extended focus on vision affected the potential of the long-term change we desired.

#### **Question #1b**

*How do teachers describe their own experiences during the transition and the impact the change process had on their teaching during those 3-years?*

“...creative breakthroughs are always preceded by periods of cloudy thinking, confusion, exploration, trial and stress” (Fullan, 2001).

**Teachers' initial responses to the implementation.** As previously referenced, Kelchterman (2005) suggests that the change process can become increasingly complicated as it is implemented because new policies and practices affect and influence teacher emotions. This is certainly evident in the current study as teachers' reported strong feelings and emotions when initially being made aware of the upcoming transition from Open Court to balanced literacy. It appears most viewed the change as something negative and were not in favor of the transition. The reasons they provided for these

feelings varied, including concern about their students and whether the use of balanced literacy would adequately prepare them academically. Teachers' descriptions of the initial implementation period can certainly exemplify this statement, as they described being nervous, full of fear, against the transition, full of stress and anxiety, with Ingrid declaring, "I hated it. This is terrible". With practice and time, they became more accepting of the learning and reflection required to participate in the process, as well as take new instructional strategies back to their classrooms to practice. Some teachers, however, appeared to readily accepted the process, showing less resistance than others, while others looked at the process positively since its inception seeing it as a way to learn something new and noting how important it is to be knowledgeable about literacy instruction.

**Teachers' perception of basal instruction.** I think it would be too simple to declare that this fear of the implementation process as due solely to a fear of change, although I'm sure there was an element of that. I believe that a main motivator influencing that fear of change was a solid dependence on the Open Court curriculum. Scripted programs are designed to encourage total adherence and discourage teacher thought and decision-making as evidenced in constant reminders of 'fidelity to the program'. Teachers are discouraged from making instructional decisions in lieu of the teaching manual having made those decisions for them. Out of concern for their students, and in some cases their test scores, our teachers indicated that they closely followed the script and attached activities. Teachers were aware of the many shortcomings in the program, such as vocabulary, comprehension, and writing instruction. Other teachers also knew that following the program as it was designed did not provide adequate support for

their students who struggled with reading, the majority of whom could not even read the grade level appropriate material provided by Open Court. Teachers acknowledged that they needed to do something different, but none had the tools, or confidence, to do so due to their limited knowledge of literacy strategies. The teachers who did make modifications did so by adding worksheets which was a practice that was most likely replicated from standard Open Court practices.

**Adequate materials.** Teachers reported having the resources they needed to effectively implement balanced literacy in the manner that they saw fit. As is rarely the case in predominantly African American schools, my school was known for being “resource rich”--a school that provided teachers with ample materials, supplies, and resources. This occurred because my principal placed a priority on, and budgeted for instructional materials that would directly impact the classroom. It is important for anyone attempting to implement balanced literacy instruction in their school to realize that a transition to balanced literacy is an expensive proposition, as it requires a variety of resources to successfully implement its components. Our teachers used the Benchmark Assessment System to assess students for placement in guiding reading groups, fiction and nonfiction leveled readers for guided reading groups, and classroom sets of novels for rich literature to use for comprehension instruction and encourage the love of reading. Teachers also had phonics kits, comprehension kits, and a vast array of teaching resources. Fullan (2001) suggests that implementing the use of new materials contributes to sustained change over time, and the teachers I interviewed recognized that the availability of these new materials was a necessary part of changes they made in their instructional practice.

**Changed practices.** It is expected that teachers will change some aspect of their instructional practice when a school adopts a new academic initiative. In fact, the success or failure of that initiative depends on how well teachers implement these new practices and to what degree (Dowell, et. al, 2012). As a result, we used professional development, classroom observations, coaching, modeling, and feedback to improve the chances that our teachers would acquire new teaching practices, as well as know when and how to apply these new practices to their instruction.

As a result of our efforts, there was an obvious change in instructional practice as reported by teachers and evidenced in classroom observations. Teacher practice shifted to such a large degree that other schools scheduled visits to our school to observe exemplary balanced literacy practices. As a result of balanced literacy, teachers assessed often and used assessment data to group students and plan appropriate instruction. They regularly planned instruction using all components of the Gradual Release of Responsibility, and incorporated modeling and guided practice as an essential part of their daily instruction. Teachers also explicitly taught comprehension strategy instruction and allowed students multiple opportunities to practice before determining proficiency then assigning grades. Teachers also began to incorporate balanced literacy practices in their content area instruction, teaching literacy through the use of nonfiction text. Needless to say, our teachers moved far along the continuum away from teaching as outlined by Open Court and it became evident to teachers that their instructional practices after balanced literacy implementation differed from instruction when using Open Court.

**Changed beliefs.** While it was not difficult to document changes in teacher practice, it was a bit more complicated to determine whether their beliefs also change in

ways that would support balanced literacy implementation, although both are principally important to support a transformation of school culture (Marzano, et al., 2005). Cheek, et. al, (2004) found that university coursework influenced teacher beliefs, and has the potential to also impact reading instruction since instructional reading practices are influenced by teacher beliefs (Richardson, et al., 1991; Stahl & Hayes, 1997). As a result, I designed professional development and data analysis activities with an emphasis on challenging what teachers thought they knew and believed about reading instruction.

Even though it is difficult to prove changes in teacher beliefs, I believe the data in this study shows that participating teachers' beliefs did, in fact, change in terms of how students learn, how educators should teach, and new understandings regarding their students' capabilities. Denise changed her perspective about what a classroom should look and sound like, shifting from a preference for a quiet controlled classroom to placing value in a classroom that involves noise and movement; an interactive place where students talk about books and their writing and share stories from their lives in the same manner that authors do. Veronica began to encourage and expect more independence from her students as she became aware of how much they could learn when they are able to construct their own learning by doing. Although these were observances from participants in this study, I observed these very same instances in classrooms where teachers who, some with a little coaxing, moved student desks from rows facing the front of the classroom to collaborative group clusters and student-oriented activities such as centers, peer conferring, etc. The new room reconfigurations speak volumes about how teacher messages shifted from "I'm the authority, you learn from me" to, 'We share responsibility for learning in this room.' And while this did not occur in every classroom,

more than 90 percent of our teachers had their desks in clusters compared to about 10-15% prior to the implementation process. Such configurations would elicit student-to-student talk simply because of the proximity of students to one another and because they were now facing each other rather facing than the teacher in the front of the class.

Another indication of a change in beliefs was evidenced in Veronica's assertions that her students were more capable than she previously thought. In this case, she made a statement regarding how she now teaches less, but notices that her students learn so much more during opportunities to practice or construct their own learning. Before the implementation she saw herself as the "depositor of knowledge" (Freire, 1970), and considered the time she spent talking to her students (lecturing) as the most effective and valuable form of instruction. Balanced literacy tasks, however, necessitate the use of a gradual release of responsibility and mini-lesson formats that include direct, explicit instruction, while allowing much more time for modeling and guided practice. The potential for productive independent work increases if the teacher has provided enough time during guided practice to determine misunderstandings and provide corrective feedback. Also, balanced literacy tasks, such as Writer's Workshop, shared reading, guided reading, and word study, allow students to function to the level in which they are capable. As students become equipped to handle more complex tasks, they perform at more advanced levels without the limits that can be imposed by a teacher edition. In this case, students were allowed to show the teacher that they were capable of achieving much more than she had believed in the past, which helped to change her beliefs about what to expect from students.

Another astonishing, but not surprising change in beliefs, is that teachers became

more confident in their ability to teach reading. As they were provided with the strategies and knowledge for effective literacy instruction, and were given opportunities to observe, practice, and receive corrective feedback, they were able to see for themselves that such practices work and the effectiveness of implementing these practices. Teachers felt confident about making instructional decisions and about the reflective process involved in such decision-making, whereas before, they followed the program outline because they did not seem to know what else to do. As evidence of this change, a group of teachers approached me towards the end of our third year with an appeal to move ahead on the school literacy Scope and Sequence (curriculum) document. I agreed with their request on the condition that they prove they should advance by showing me evidence from student data to support the request. Their challenge to the supposed ‘status quo’ was a change in behavior brought on by a new understanding that their students could manage work that was academically more difficult than they thought prior to balanced literacy implementation.

**Sustained, systematic professional development.** Teachers credited the professional development sessions as an integral and necessary part of the implementation process. Their perspective is aligned with the research of Walpole and McKenna (2004), who insist that ongoing professional development is an essential component of a successful implementation process. At the beginning of implementation, PD sessions emphasized the research supporting balanced literacy instruction and its components, starting with research as a justification for the rationale behind moving from Open Court to balanced literacy. These sessions also included providing teachers opportunities to review research articles, which was a purposeful decision on my part to



provide a rationale for the shift to balanced literacy. I believe that such rationale and research can also shift the instructional narrative in a teachers' thinking, which then influences their beliefs and, ultimately, their behaviors. Participating teachers recalled items presented in professional development sessions as support for continuing balanced literacy practices such as independent reading, Writer's Workshop, and guided reading. They then continued to implement balanced literacy practices instead of returning to low-level test preparation activities, an indication of how professional development influenced teacher behaviors.

Teachers' were also made aware of balanced literacy through professional development sessions where they participated in a study of balanced literacy components and subcomponents "piece by piece," as topics were covered systematically and in more detail in subsequent PD sessions. For example, we began with an overview of Writing Workshop and then progressed to different aspects of this instructional practice such as the structure of the workshop session, minilesson components, conferring strategies and techniques, etc. This, too, emerged as a conscious decision to provide teachers opportunities to focus their intellectual and experiential attention on small, but important aspects of balanced literacy while simultaneously building confidence and momentum. This contributed to the success of the implementation in that teachers acquired knowledge about balanced literacy practices through trial and error as they received support from myself and other instructional staff. Teachers acknowledged this process of 'piece by piece' implementation as a positive part of their implementation experience and an aspect that helped them acquire new practices.

Prior to my arrival as Literacy Coordinator, professional development sessions

were a mix of presentations and information sessions communicated without organization of topics or connection to previous sessions or school initiatives. My arrival introduced coherent training sessions designed to increase teacher knowledge and instructional capacity that were new to the staff and may have taken some time to adjust. As the facilitator, I can recall PD as a sort of ‘battleground’ that I felt was constantly being challenged and, in some cases, derided by teachers who seemed to resent having to participate in professional development. In the yearly teacher surveys, this resentment became clear in teacher remarks that stated their desire to see more outside experts and teachers presenting during PD sessions, a message that they basically wanted to see less of me. Teachers complained about having to attend PD every week and wanted more time in their classrooms instead. I remember having feelings of rising panic at the thought of planning and delivering another PD because of the negativity that could be felt in the room. Over time, this constant disapproval and other verbal and non-verbal assaults, led to stress-related neck and back pains as I mentioned in Chapter Four.

After two years, however, teachers appeared to become more accepting of professional development when they became aware of how it was an asset to their teaching. Our PD sessions usually included learning opportunities such as modeling of instructional techniques and component characteristics, the presentation of commercial and teacher videos, after school workshops, small group work (during professional development and grade level meetings), opportunities for dialogue and questioning, and collaboration with other teachers. My goal for PD was not only give them knowledge through presentations and professional readings, but also to allow them to make the transfer from knowledge to implementation in a low-risk environment with peer

feedback, time to talk through potential improvements, and subsequently make those improvements in their classrooms. Teachers were allowed to work in small groups (usually grade level groupings) during PD and in optional after school workshops. Small groups are used in classrooms to allow students to interact with concepts on a deeper level, which I concluded would benefit teachers in similar ways. These practices were also often used to model strategies they could take back into the classroom for their students.

Visiting presenters were also touted as a positive part of PD experiences, as Ingrid describes a benefit in “hearing it from somebody else”. Intellectually, I was aware that I could not be the expert in everything and considered myself fortunate to have a community of literacy experts and educators upon whom I could call to provide services for my teachers. I noticed, however, a difference in the way teachers responded to the visiting presenters as to the way they responded to me. I also noticed that these presenters all happened to be White. This, and other teacher reactions, led me to determine that the resistance I experienced had basis in the fact that I was an African American woman.

## **Question #2**

*Is there evidence that race or perceptions of roles as it relates to race influenced the process in any way? If so, what is it and how?*

As is often the case involving change initiatives in schools, there was a considerable amount of what I considered resistance all during the three-year implementation period. Such resistance was often referred to as ‘push back,’ and I was warned to expect as much in my interview by the principal and assistant principal. This

“push back” took on many forms such as questioning the process (e.g., “Why do we have to do this?”) and/or what was required as a result of the implementation, to inappropriate behavior during PD sessions (e.g., talking, grading papers, etc.) or even refusing to adhere to literacy schedules or expectations. Some of this ‘push back’ was obvious and overt, such as refusing to submit lesson plans; whereas other forms of resistance in more covert and/or subtle ways, such as turning in a copy of the same lesson plan from earlier in the year or turning in required data forms that were forged rather than actually administered. There was certainly less resistance in year three than in year one, but it was not a steady decline, nor was it possible to predict which teachers would or would not act in ways that could be perceived as resistant.

This question of race was ignited because, although I expected and was prepared for teachers to question, challenge, and even show opposition to elements of the change process, I noticed that some of the teachers only exhibited resistance to literacy expectations but would willingly implement what the White, male assistant principals directed them to do without complaint or even a posturing of resistance. As noted above, these acceptance behaviors extended to the visiting professional developers invited to present on relevant curricular topics, who were all White and predominantly female. As an African American woman in leadership, I often wondered how my brown skin and curly/kinky hair affected the way people might respond to me, the work I do, and the professional responsibilities in which they were involved. In this situation, I interpreted the manner in which people responded as having a basis in my unapologetic presentation as an African American woman with an Afro. As previously mentioned, I began to suffer from the physical effects of this constant opposition as well as the verbal and non-verbal

assaults that occurred over time. Davis (1989) describes these assaults as racial microaggressions that cause stress to the target who must decide whether and how to respond to such incidences. The decision to respond, or not, and the manner in which to do so exacerbates the anxiety associated with these attacks and renders the victim open to further attacks. If I were to respond, I would have been considered an ‘Angry Black Woman’ potentially compromising my professional reputation and taking the focus off the work of the implementation. If I did not respond, I would be viewed as weak and ineffective further supporting those who viewed me as lacking power in comparison to the other members of administration. I found myself suffering the very real effects of a “mental, emotional, and physical strain” that William Smith (2004) termed “racial battle fatigue”. Critical Race Theory asserts that the effects of racism in education are sometimes revealed physically as African Americans creatively determine ways to navigate through rough racial terrain (Allen & Solórzano, 2001).

Most participants did not recognize nor acknowledge race as a factor in the implementation process. All participants did, however, acknowledge the resistance but attributed the oppositional occurrences to other causes. According to Denise, being the only female administrator was a factor. Other interviewees suggested it was the shortcomings or “stubbornness” of the individual teachers that led some to fail to comply with some literacy expectations, as Ingrid insists they were “just not doing what they were supposed to do”. Only one interviewee, Evelyn, emphatically suggested that race might have been a factor in the manner in which teachers responded to the literacy initiatives associated with me and my leadership. Evelyn’s comments gave voice to my thoughts about the difference in behaviors shown during some of my professional development

sessions and those shown for other White presenters. The fact that teachers made comments about a typical African American hairstyle as a reference to me (“She’s standing up there, you know, with her afro”), and that they would often speak of my hair style when referring to me, suggests that race was at least part of their considerations about the manner in which they responded to me.

I considered the possibility that teachers were less than enthusiastic towards my professional development sessions because my offerings were, in a sense, high-stakes. There was always an expectation associated with the work I did in professional development. Topics for my professional development workshops were connected to the implementation process and/or school initiatives, thus teachers had a responsibility to follow through with the knowledge, information, and practices presented in our professional development sessions. For example, a review of guided reading components would necessitate guided reading lesson plans and observations of small group instruction. The increased accountability associated with my professional development demanded an increased level of participation, commitment, risk, and workload that was greater than what was expected from the isolated or informational presentations teachers experienced when participating in meetings by other people.

Interestingly, the comments about my hair and the connection to my Blackness were only heard from other African American teachers. The fact that African Americans made these comments is not surprising since systemic racism, according to Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), is perpetuated by individuals from the oppressed group, as well as those belonging to the oppressor group, in a *system* that supports and maintains perspectives and reactions propagating the ideal of White supremacy. This

does not make it any less racist. Teachers of other races made negative comments that were not related to race, which is not surprising either because ‘decent’ people do not make racist comments, and teachers are ‘decent’ people. Decent people do, however, embrace perspectives that work to subjugate those belonging to minority groups and may act in ways that display discomfort when an individual’s actions conflict with the narrative created by this perspective.

Evelyn suggested that teachers may have felt “intimidated” by my knowledge and would use the expression “She thinks she knows everything (about reading)” to denounce me professionally (or personally). I would suggest that this approach is along the lines of what Mirza describes as ‘infantalization’ or a process whereby Blacks are viewed as incapable of being in authority (Mirza, 2005). The fact that we had an African American principal present did not negate this occurrence because, since this is a result of systemic racism, he can support this belief in his actions as well--as he did when he informed teachers to close the doors and teach in the manner they chose to thereby disregarding me as the literacy leader. Furthermore, I would speculate that at some point the teachers and staff may have experienced cognitive dissonance, or a mental conflict with their previous understandings, relating to my literacy knowledge and my placement in a leadership role since this might have spoken against their belief about what Black people should know and do. Again, this perspective does not have to apply to only those who are not Black as I believe that this can be, and was, a perspective shared across racial lines.

Just to be clear, the majority of participants denied that race influenced the implementation process. Some or most people, possibly the participants in this study, do not see race connected to the larger sensibilities that contribute to and comprise our

everyday experiences. The subtle but spiteful and wounding racial assaults, or micro-aggressions are not unheard of or uncommon as they occur regularly to persons of color in an array of academic contexts (Delgado, Bernal, & Villalpando, 2002; Solórzano, 1998; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). My own awareness that African Americans are often viewed as unintelligent, less capable, and only deserving of subservient roles in dominant society surely influenced my concerns regarding how others would view my leadership status in the school. During my interview process, I was even warned that the campus environment was one that displayed open hostility towards Blacks in leadership roles as evidenced by past instances of professional and personal attacks. As a result, I consciously performed in this role in ways that were meant to be hyper-professional so as not to ‘offend’ with my Blackness.

John Back (2004) describes this experience as one in which the African American professional cannot exist as their authentic selves but must function under a racial microscope of hyper-surveillance where mistakes or, in some cases basic human responses to issues, are magnified as proof that the person is incompetent and undeserving of authority. I believe, though, that my attempts at hyper-professionalism and a perceived inability to show my real self compromised my ability to form relationships with most of the staff. It seems that the very attribute that some respondents said might have helped me promote the implementation process, having relationships, was impossible to put into effect because the environment, as well as my previous experiences as an African American woman in leadership positions, dictated the need to enact this hyper-professional persona, thereby protecting and hiding my true existence, in order to guard against racial attacks.



## **Limitations**

Given that this study occurred retroactively, there is always the danger that participants might not recall incidences and circumstances as they actually occurred. Therefore, retroactive case studies must be considered as only one account of several possible versions of the same story, all of which may differ based on the individual's memory of their personal experiences. In this study, participants definitely brought up items that I had forgotten. Along those same lines, there were events and occurrences that the participants spoke of in different terms than I remembered as well. Therein lies the strength of a case study that uses triangulated data, in this case, data from the researcher, the teachers, and from artifacts generated and used during the implementation period. From these three data points, a story emerged that should adequately address the research questions in a meaningful way.

Interview data were collected by a subset of teachers who report to have benefitted greatly from their participation in the implementation process. In addition, a positive relationship was shared between these individuals and myself as evidenced by their willingness to volunteer their time and energy to provide information and insight for my benefit with minimal gain for themselves. As a result, interview responses must be considered in light of the fact that participants had at least some positive feelings towards my work and/or the implementation process. The other teachers who were invited, but declined to participate, may have viewed my work or the implementation with more skepticism or less positively and thus may have provided much different perspectives than the viewpoints from those whom were interviewed.

Finally, conversations about race are always difficult, especially between Black and White Americans. There are things about race that ‘good, decent’ people aren’t allowed to believe about themselves and thus, will not even admit their thinking about this to themselves much less other people. Beliefs about racism are often generalized to mean a person is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ and to acknowledge racist actions is to declare a person is either all good or all bad. This further complicates conversations about racism because of the baggage that must accompany confessions that identify certain occurrences to be racist. Also, racism can be so subtle as Pierce (1974) reminds us that “one must not look for the gross and obvious. The subtle, cumulative miniassault is the substance of today’s racism” (p. 516). These miniassaults, or microaggressions, are oftentimes delicate, though direct, and can be veiled behind criticisms that may simply match the culture of that particular institution and become concealed as a consequence of a dysfunctional environment. Honestly, I wasn’t expecting my White participants to say that they recognized race as a factor in the implementation process, nor was I confident that they would say their peers did because most Whites simply lack the sensitivity to see or sense subtle racism. On the other hand, I did expect more African American participants to acknowledge a racial impact on the activities that occurred and was subsequently surprised that their reactions did not overwhelmingly mirror my own.

### **Implications for further research**

Further research needs to be conducted on the role of the Literacy Coordinator as the literacy leader in a true administrative capacity within a school or a cluster of schools. The research on the Literacy Coordinator position was painfully scarce leading me to

believe this position title is uncommon and oftentimes confused with that of a Literacy Coach. I make the distinction between these two positions by including the administrative duties and ultimate decision-making ability under the Literacy Coordinator title. A Literacy Coach fulfills many of the duties of a Literacy Coordinator, but in most cases, lacks the authority of the Literacy Coordinator and has little control. In the past, there was a dearth of studies with a focus on the roles and duties of the Literacy Coach and their effectiveness. More recently, however, there has been ample research on the Literacy Coach as a result of Reading First legislation that required and funded the Literacy Coach role as well as further considerations regarding more ways to support literacy achievement in our schools. As the reading profession continues to evolve, studies on the Literacy Coordinator will most likely become more plentiful as schools and districts continue to search for ways to increase the likelihood that implementation efforts are successful. These studies should focus on the expectations and qualifications of a Literacy Coordinator based on position duties, and the expertise and experiences an individual would need to fulfill this role effectively. As political entities continue to require higher and higher literacy achievement, the time to seriously consider what a “good” Literacy Coordinator does, then design programs that properly prepare qualified people for this essential role.

As we further explore the Literacy Coordinator’s leadership, I believe much more attention is needed to explore the impact of race and relationship as it relates to teacher change. School reform often includes teacher change and relationship impacts change efforts. As we document the types of structures needed to improve the likelihood that school improvements will be successful, we can also benefit from documenting the ways

in which beliefs about race affect the potential for relationship building between literacy leaders of color and school staff. Such a focus could provide us with the context regarding how to identify racially influenced situations, as a first step, and work towards establishing tools and structures to confront such instances. School environments that contain and foster ongoing racial microaggressions, without structures to deal with them, lack the ability to reach their fullest potential as an institution. A closer look at the racial climate in schools and its effects on teachers, administration, and students could provide a foundation for further discussion and an enhanced awareness of how race affects school environments.

Ultimately, further research is necessary as we still seek reliable models of literacy instruction and systems implementation that will result in consistent literacy achievement for African American children. There are many factors that can and do impact reading gains in schools serving mostly African American children such as teacher experience, school culture, poverty, home literacy, etc. What continues to confound, I believe, is when African American children attend schools sitting alongside their White peers and still achieve at lower levels. There are surely elements of race and possibly privilege that make this phenomenon difficult to address and, therefore, even more difficult to resolve. Critical Race Theory purports that racism exists in education, meaning that a teaching population of mostly White teachers, and an educational institution that places a higher value on the mainstream American culture over other cultures, inherently embodies structures and expectations that compromise the achievements of Black children. It is a matter of social justice, and of our basic civil rights, that no citizens be denied equal access to schooling, employment, and the ability

to reach their fullest economic potential. Effective literacy instruction, regardless of race, is a powerful step toward guaranteeing the promise of reading as a basic civil right to all citizens of the United States.

### **Concluding Remarks**

As a participant researcher in this case study, I personally experienced and examined the changes that occurred in the midst of the implementation process at the focal school. As I expect from all of my experiences, I planned to use what I had learned in the hopes of applying this knowledge in a Literacy Coordinator or literacy leader position at another school or in support of principals and/or literacy leaders as they implement new literacy initiatives or programs. I grew a great deal during this process professionally and personally, as a researcher as well as a participant in the study. An unexpected outcome of this study, however, is what I have learned about myself as an educator and as a researcher.

Conducting this research placed me, psychologically, mentally, and emotionally back in the Literacy Coordinator position as I listened to, reflected on, and analyzed various aspects of this study. During implementation, I was constantly placed in a position to defend my expertise and my professionalism in a way that I had not been asked to do so before taking on the duties of Literacy Coordinator. These feelings of defensiveness surprisingly (or not) reemerged as I analyzed the interviews even to the point where it influenced my analysis of teacher responses. The self-preservation tactics in which I had engaged during the implementation reengaged when confronted with the memories, responses, and feelings that accompanied those occurrences. As I heard

accounts that conflicted with my recollections of events, I initially responded by correcting their account with my own final accounting of how the event actually occurred from my point of view. This was particularly applicable to the question about race. I was genuinely surprised, almost to the point of disappointment, that more participating teachers failed to acknowledge what I perceived as blatant racism against myself and other African Americans in leadership in our school. It seemed so obvious to me that the actions and the motivations were, at times, personal and racially motivated. Part of my journey as a researcher has been to embrace these various ways of knowing not as perspectives that should mirror my own, but as valid, valuable considerations that stand alone as truth from multiple viewpoints. The perspectives of the participants were beyond valuable in the manner in which they provided me with this view of the change process from their perspectives. I learned to allow those perspectives to exist with equal weight and value alongside my own.

I am aware that this study may sound like two different stories—teachers who glowingly attributed the work done during the implementation process as empowering and beneficial to their professional careers, and the other teachers who, according to the survey responses, offered less than positive comments regarding the process. It is worth mentioning that the participating teachers were not recognizably positive towards the implementation and could have very likely been the survey commenters who were questioning my experience and expertise. The teachers who were interviewed for this study did not always respond enthusiastically and in the manner that these interviews would indicate *during* their participation in the implementation process. By their own admission, most initially displayed strong resistance to the process and these same

teachers resisted in various ways throughout the entire process. As a result, I have learned that the impact of the implementation process may not have been obvious or observable as the process occurred and the time and opportunity to reflect allowed participating teachers an opportunity to identify and appreciate the influence that participation in the implementation process had on their instruction and on the manner in which they perceived themselves as teachers.

Finally, I was able to appreciate a level of success resulting from the implementation even in the midst of difficulty and dysfunction. As I met with the participating teachers, they expressed excitement remembering their experiences during the time in which we worked together and they were very adamant regarding how much they had learned and changed from an instructional standpoint. I think this speaks directly to the importance of the change process as well as the valuable resource that this case study can provide to individuals who may consider implementing change at any level in their schools.

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## Appendix A

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your participation in this research study. Please take the time to remember, review, and reflect on the transition from Open Court to balanced literacy instruction that took place during the years between 2010 and 2014. Your written narrative will be used as data in analyzing the impact of implementation of balanced literacy and to hopefully inform our knowledge of the change process in schools.

Please use the following prompts to help you reflect on the implementation of balanced literacy. Feel free to add any additional insights at the end of the prompts if you have feedback not specifically addressed in the prompts or questions.

1. Think back to the fall of 2010 when balanced literacy was first introduced to the entire [REDACTED] staff. What was your mindset at that time regarding the teaching of literacy? What was the mindset of your colleagues?
2. Reflecting back, please describe your personal path and level of success with implementing the transition. Also, please describe anything that contributed to or interfered with your success with transitioning to balanced literacy instruction.
3. Was there any time during the implementation of new practices when your personal or professional beliefs were challenged in any way? Can you identify a change in beliefs and/or behavior at any point during this transition? If so, to what would you attribute that change?
4. The literature suggests that professional development is an important part of institutional change. Please explain the opportunities that existed at [REDACTED] during the implementation of balanced literacy. Also, what was your response to these professional development activities? Why?
5. How did you see the role of the Literacy Coordinator in the change process? How do you perceive others'?
6. The change to balance literacy occurred over a 3-4 year time span. How did the balanced literacy program evolve over this span of time? Were there any adjustments made during the implementation phase? If so, what were they and why do you think they were made?
7. Overall, what was your impression of the change process at [REDACTED] over the 3-4 year time span? What was your overall impression of the Literacy Coordinator's decisions and/ or activities during this time?

Appendix B  
**INFORMED CONSENT**

Adult Individual Participants

I consent to participate in a research project titled, A Case Study of an African American Literacy Coordinator's Role in Transitioning a School from Dependence on a Core Reading Program to Balanced Literacy Instruction. I understand that this study will be conducted by Kimberly A. Chase, doctoral student at National Louis University, Chicago, Illinois, and that it will take place from November 12, 2014 – December 12, 2014.

I understand that the purpose of this study is to describe what happened during the implementation process for a school that transitioned away from a scripted reading program to balanced literacy instruction. In particular:

1. What and how the Literacy Coordinator may have equipped teachers to make this change.
2. Teachers' experiences during this transition and how these may have impacted their instruction
3. Any evidence that race or perceptions of roles as related to race may have influenced the transition/change process.

I understand that my involvement will include participating in a one-on-one audio-taped interview lasting about an hour, with a possible follow-up discussion group, also lasting about an hour. As compensation for my time, I will receive a \$5 Starbucks gift card.

I understand that I may ask questions or raise concerns at any time during this process, and that my participation is voluntary. I am aware that I may request that the audio-tape be turned off at any time during interviews should I feel uncomfortable. I also understand that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

I understand that my participation in this study have no anticipated risks or benefits greater than those encountered in daily life. Although I may not receive any direct benefit from being in this research study, my participation may contribute to a better understanding of my own professional growth as a teacher of reading and writing.

I understand that the results of this study may be published or otherwise reported to scientific bodies, and that my identity, as well as that of the school and district will in no way be revealed. I also understand that all data collected during this inquiry, such as field notes, and audio-taped data will be held in a secure place that only the researcher has access to. Upon request, I may receive a copy of my interview transcript, at which time I may clarify information therein.

If I have any concerns or questions before, or during participation that I feel have not been addressed, I may contact Kimberly A. Chase, National Louis University; 773-972-8686; kchase@my.nl.edu or Dr. Sophie Degener, Associate Professor and Dissertation Co-Chair (Sophie.Degener@nl.edu, 224-233-2018) or the chair of NLU's Institutional Research Review Board: Dr Shaunti Knauth, National Louis University (122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60603; ; email: shaunti.knauth@nl.edu).

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Name (Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher (Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date